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THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

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A COTTAGE IN A CORNFIELD

A Suffolk Scene

*Painted by* JOHN CONSTABLE, R.A.

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# THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

A PICTORIAL SURVEY

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*Introduced by*

J. B. Priestley

*With Contributions by*

Edmund Barber, Harry Batsford, George Blake,  
J. S. Fletcher, Charles Bradley Ford, Charles  
Fry, Clive Rouse, A. G. Street, Will F. Taylor,  
Sir William Beach Thomas, Edmund Vale

*and 109 Illustrations  
from Photographs*



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## FOREWORD

REGULARLY each year, towards May, the newspaper reader becomes aware of a mild editorial 'drive' to extol the holiday attractions of this island to a public growing restive of its workaday environment, and beginning to dream of a blissful fortnight's freedom in the country or by the sea. 'The Beauty of Britain' becomes then a familiar slogan, and much ink is spilt in emphasizing the peculiar advantages of a home holiday, the superiority of the Scottish Highlands to the Swiss Alps, the 'English Riviera' to its Mediterranean counterpart, and so on. We are not concerned here with the niceties of such comparisons; but we *do* know that, despite its swollen population and industrial growth, Britain can still provide as fine a field as any for the tourist, from home or overseas; and it seems a pity that those concerned in helping John Smith to select his this-year's destination should largely restrict themselves to a group of crowded resorts and conventional holiday areas, leaving the real country to the enjoyment of its normal population *plus* a small and discriminating circle of the more enterprising who feel the spell of its bountiful attractions.

The chief purpose of this book is to attempt to reveal to the public at large, through a group of able and experienced guides and with the help of up-to-date photography, some aspects of Britain's beauty that do not normally figure in the tourist brochures. Whilst our divisions are broad in the geographical sense, paying little heed to county boundaries, each of them represents an area convenient and profitable for a touring holiday,

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

possessed of a beauty and individuality which it has been the aim both of writer and photographer to record. The reader who swallows the book at a gulp should be rewarded by a broad but balanced impression of the wealth of rural beauty that this island can command. At the same time, Britain is so varied in its natural gifts, so rich in interest and association, that it has been impossible to present anything like a detailed survey within these limits, either in letterpress or illustration. The book attempts to provide a broad outline; necessarily the reader will sometimes have to fill in the detail for himself.

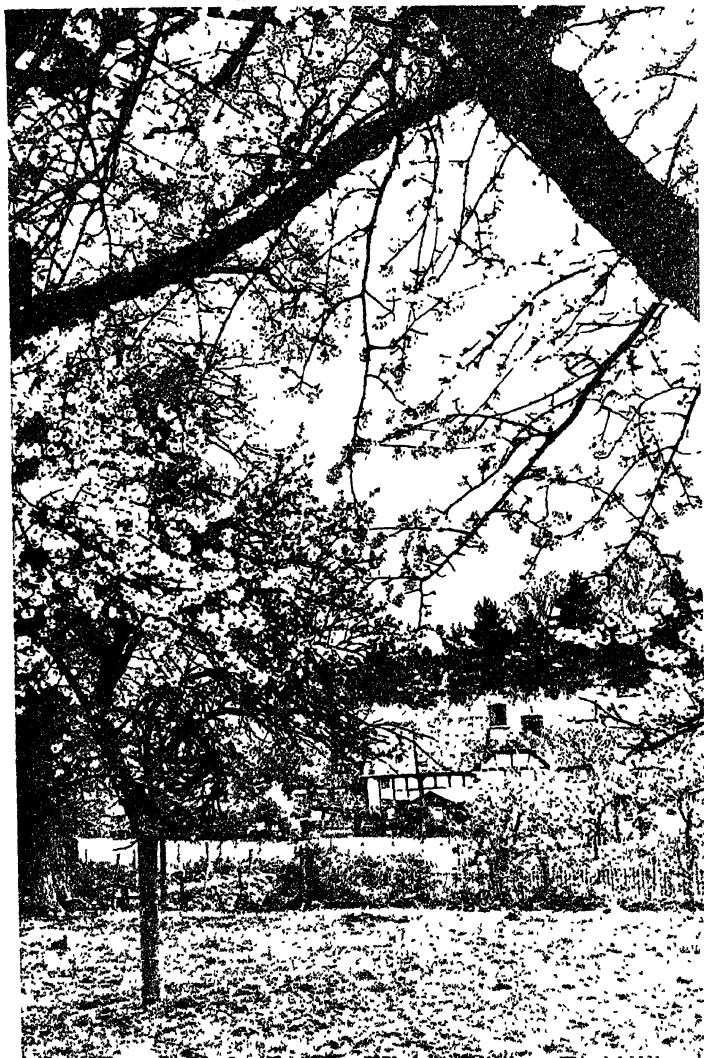
It remains to record with deep regret the death of Mr. J. S. Fletcher only a few days after the completion of his present article. This was, we believe, the last production of a long and honourable literary career. Mr. Fletcher will be mourned not only as a gifted novelist, with a vast international following, but as one of the most able and scholarly of the topographers of the North Country.

CHARLES BRADLEY FORD

*April 1935*



I DARTMOUTH, DEVON: AN OLD STREET



2 SPRING IN THE VALE OF EVESHAM, WORCESTERSHIRE

J. B. Priestley

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THE  
BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

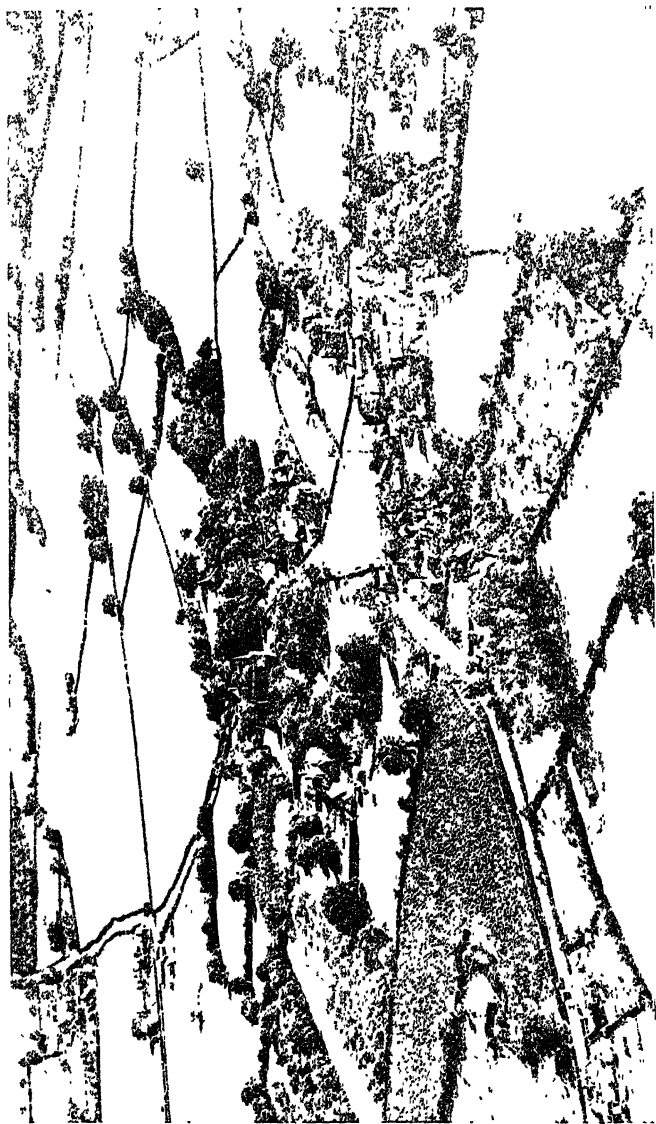
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WE live on one of the most beautiful islands in the world. This is a fact we are always forgetting. When beautiful islands are mentioned, we think of Trinidad or Tahiti. These are fine, romantic places, but they are not really as exquisitely beautiful as our own Britain. Before the mines and factories came, and long before we went from bad to worse with our arterial roads and petrol stations and horrible brick bungalows, this country must have been an enchantment, designed by God to be the earthly paradise of wandering water-colourists. Even now, after we have been busy for so long flinging mud at this fair pale face, the enchantment still remains. Between the cities, away from the arterial roads, there are still bright tracts of this earthly paradise. Sometimes I doubt if we deserve to possess them. There can be few parts of the world in which commercial greed and public indifference have combined to do more damage than they have here. We have been hard at it fouling our nest for a long time now. The process

continues. It is still too often assumed that any enterprising fellow after quick profits has a perfect right to destroy a loveliness that is the heritage of the whole community.

It is not that the ordinary Briton is completely insensitive. I believe that he has a better sense of beauty than most aesthetes imagine. The trouble is, he is too mentally lazy to make quick effective protests. He grumbles privately, knowing very well that the favourite local bit of countryside now spoilt has been lost to him for ever, but he does no more. I am certain, however, that he misses what is gone. I spent my childhood and youth in the West Riding, where trams go groaning on through miles and miles of dark streets, where the very houses look like little factories and the factories themselves look like great grim fortresses, and all the works of man are formidable and forbidding. But nearly everybody in these gloomy West Riding towns had a genuine passion for the neighbouring countryside, for the high moors and deep green dales of the Pennine region. They were great walkers, these people, and would trudge on for hours to catch another glimpse of a favourite bit of moorland or dale. The roughest fellows, whom you might imagine to care for nothing but beer and football, would surprise you with their fine appreciation of the country. I have never known any people so well as I knew these, but I cannot believe that they were altogether exceptional. I prefer to think that I would find the same traits almost everywhere in this island.

I shall be told that the newer generations care nothing for the beauty of the countryside, that all they want is to go rushing about on motor-cycles or in fast cars. Speed is not one of my gods; rather one of my devils; but we must give this devil its due. I believe that swift



3 A HAMLET IN THE WEALD OF KENT: HIGH HALDEN





4 A HAMLET IN THE NEW FOREST: SWAN GREEN, HAMPSHIRE

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

motion across a countryside does not necessarily take away all appreciation of its charm. It depends on the nature of the country. With some types of landscape there is a definite gain simply because you are moving so swiftly across the face of the country. There is a certain kind of pleasant but dullish, rolling country, not very attractive to the walker or slow traveller, that becomes alive if you go quickly across it, for it is turned into a kind of sculptured landscape. As your car rushes along the rolling roads, it is as if you were passing a hand over a relief map. Here, obviously, there has been a gain, not a loss, and this is worth remembering. The newer generations, with their passion for speed, are probably far more sensitive than they are thought to be. Probably they are all enjoying aesthetic experiences that so far they have been unable to communicate to the rest of us. We must not be too pessimistic about young people if they prefer driving and gulping to walking and tasting.

The beauty of our country—or at least all of it south of the Highlands—is as hard to define as it is easy to enjoy. Remembering other and larger countries, we see at once that one of its charms is that it is immensely varied within a small compass. We have here no vast mountain ranges, no illimitable plains, no leagues of forest, and are deprived of the grandeur that may accompany these things. But we have superb variety. A great deal of everything is packed into little space. I suspect that we are always faintly conscious of the fact that this is a smallish island, with the sea always round the corner. We know that everything has to be neatly packed into a small space. Nature, we feel, has carefully adjusted things—mountains, plains, rivers, lakes—to the scale of the island itself. A mountain 12,000 feet high would be

a horrible monster here, as wrong as a plain 400 miles long, a river as broad as the Mississippi. In America the whole scale is too big, except for aviators. There is always too much of everything. There you find yourself in a region that is all mountains, then in another region that is merely part of one colossal plain. You can spend a long, hard day in the Rockies simply travelling up or down one valley. You can wander across prairie country that has the desolating immensity of the ocean. Everything is too big; there is too much of it.

Though the geographical features of this island are comparatively small, and there is astonishing variety almost everywhere, that does not mean that our mountains are not mountains, our plains not plains. Consider that piece of luck of ours, the Lake District. You can climb with ease—as I have done many a time—several of its mountains in one day. Nevertheless, you feel that they are mountains and not mere hills—as a correspondent pointed out in *The Times* recently. This same correspondent told a story that proves my point. A party of climbers imported a Swiss guide into the Lake District, and on the first morning, surveying the misty, jagged peaks before him, he pointed to a ledge about two-thirds of the way up one of them and suggested that the party should spend the night there. He did not know that that ledge was only an hour or two's journey away and that before the light went they would probably have conquered two or three of these peaks. He had not realized the scale of the country. He did not know that he was looking at mountains in miniature. What he did know was that he was certainly looking at mountains, and he was right, for these peaks, some of them less than 3,000 feet high, have all the air of great mountains,

like those in the Snowdon country, with their grim slaty faces.

My own favourite country, perhaps because I knew it as a boy, is that of the Yorkshire Dales. For variety of landscape, these Dales cannot be matched in this island or anywhere else. A day's walk among them will give you almost everything fit to be seen on this earth. Within a few hours, you have enjoyed the green valleys, with their rivers, fine old bridges, pleasant villages, hanging woods, smooth fields; and then the moorland slopes, with their rushing streams, stone walls, salty winds and crying curlews, white farm-houses; and then the lonely heights, which seem to be miles above the ordinary world, with their dark tarns, heather and ling and harebells, and moorland tracks as remote, it seems, as trails in Mongolia. Yet less than an hour in a fast motor will bring you to the middle of some manufacturing town, which can be left and forgotten just as easily as it can be reached from these heights.

With variety goes surprise. Ours is the country of happy surprises. You have never to travel long without being pleasantly astonished. It would not be difficult to compile a list of such surprises that would fill the next fifty pages, but I will content myself with suggesting the first few that occur to me. If you go down into the West Country, among rounded hills and soft pastures; you suddenly arrive at the bleak tablelands of Dartmoor and Exmoor, genuine high moors, as if the North had left a piece of itself down there. But before you have reached them you have already been surprised by the queer bit of Fen country you have found in the neighbourhood of Glastonbury, as if a former inhabitant had been sent to Cambridge and had brought his favourite

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

fenland walk back from college with him into the West. The long, green walls of the North and South Downs are equally happy surprises. The Weald is another of them. East Anglia has a kind of rough heath country of its own that I for one never expect to find there and am always delighted to see. No doubt it is only natural that East Lincolnshire and that South-eastern spur of Yorkshire should show us an England that looks more than half Dutch, but the transition always comes as a surprise to me. Then, after the easy rolling Midlands, the dramatic Peak District, with its genuine steep fells, never fails to astonish me, for I feel that it has no business to be there. A car will take you all round the Peak District in a morning. It is nothing but a crumpled green pocket-handkerchief. Nevertheless, we hear of search-parties going out there to find lost travellers. Again, there has always been something surprising to me about those conical hills that suddenly pop up in Shropshire and along the Welsh border. I have never explored this region properly, and so it remains to me a country of mystery, with a delightful fairy-tale quality about its sugar-loaf hills. I could go on with this list of surprises, but perhaps you had better make your own.

Another characteristic of our landscape is its exquisite moderation. It looks like the result of one of those happy compromises that make our social and political plans so irrational and yet so successful. It has been born of a compromise between wildness and tameness, between Nature and Man. In many countries you pass straight from regions where men have left their mark on every inch of ground to other regions that are desolate wildernesses. Abroad, we have all noticed how abruptly most of the cities seem to begin: here, no city; there, the city.





6 SPRING ON THE WILTSHIRE DOWNS



7 SPRING ON THE WESTMORLAND FELS

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

With us the cities pretend they are not really there until we are well inside them. They almost insinuate themselves into the countryside. This comes from another compromise of ours, the suburb. There is a great deal to be said for the suburb. To people of moderate means, compelled to live fairly near their work in a city, the suburb offers the most civilized way of life. Nearly all Englishmen are at heart country gentlemen. The suburban villa enables the salesman or the clerk, out of hours, to be almost a country gentleman. (Let us admit that it offers his wife and children more solid advantages.) A man in a newish suburb feels that he has one foot in the city and one in the country. As this is the kind of compromise he likes, he is happy. There are, however, things to be said against the suburb. To begin with, now that everybody has a passion—and, in my opinion, a ridiculous passion—for living in detached or semi-detached villas, the new suburbs eat into the countryside in the greediest fashion and immensely enlarge the bounds of their cities. Nor is there anything very pleasing in the sight of these villas and bungalows, thickly sown for miles, higgledy-piggledy and messy. Then again, there are disadvantages about being neither completely urban nor completely rural: it might be better if people who work in the cities were more mentally urban, more ready to identify themselves with the life of the city proper. Thus there is something more than cheap snobbery behind that accusing cry of 'Suburban!' which we hear so often. It may mean that the accused, with his compromise, has contrived to lose the urban virtues without acquiring the rural ones, and is mentally making the worst of both worlds.

We must return, however, to the landscape, which I suggest is the result of a compromise between wildness



and cultivation, Nature and Man. Turn to the frontispiece, and notice how characteristically English the scene is. One reason for this is that it contains that exquisite balance between Nature and Man. We see a cornfield and a cottage, both solid evidences of Man's presence. But notice how these things, in the middle of the scene, are surrounded by witnesses to that ancient England that was nearly all forest and heath. The fence and the gate are man-made, but are not severely regular and trim—as they would be in some other countries. The trees and hedges, the grass and wild flowers in the foreground, all suggest that Nature has not been dragooned into obedience. Even the cottage, which has an irregularity and colouring that make it fit snugly into the landscape (as all good cottages should do), looks nearly as much a piece of natural history as the trees: you feel it might have grown there. In some countries, that cottage would have been an uncompromising cube of brick which would have declared 'No nonsense now. Man, the drainer, the tiller, the builder, has settled here'. In this English scene there is no such direct opposition. Men and trees and flowers, we feel, have all settled down comfortably together. The motto is, 'Live and let live'. This exquisite harmony between Nature and Man explains in part the enchantment of the older Britain, in which whole towns fitted snugly into the landscape, as if they were no more than bits of woodland; and roads went winding the easiest way as naturally as rivers; and it was impossible to say where cultivation ended and wild life began. It was a country rich in trees, birds, and wild flowers, as we can see to this day.

We have greater resources at our command than our ancestors had, and we are more impatient than they were.



8 MILL DALE: A HAMLET IN THE DERBYSHIRE HILLS



9 BEDGELLERT, CARNARVONSHIRE: LOOKING TOWARDS THE SNOWDON RANGE

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

The old happy compromise between Nature and Man here has been broken down. We have no need to compromise any longer. The sad victory is ours. We can set in motion our machines—like those giant excavators that can do the work of hundreds of men—and at the end of the first morning's effort make a pleasant bit of landscape look like a battle-field. The products of a machine age, though not necessarily ugly themselves, do not easily harmonize with the natural scene. The hedges, the wooden fences, even the low stone walls that bind together the Northern fells, all these were gently subdued by Nature, until at last they might have been natural growths themselves, like the mosses that covered their wood and stone. But metal railings do not grow into the scene in the same fashion; they stand apart, obstinately, from the seasons, and to the end are things of the foundry and the factory. The new towns, hastily built of materials that have come from afar and do not harmonize with the surrounding country, and the new motor roads that come to no terms with the landscape but are laid across the countryside like a ruler across a map, these are not friendly to the scene but are there like outposts of an invading army. So we cannot make a long journey anywhere in this island now without feeling uneasy, depressed. A wonderful heritage of beauty, we feel, is being recklessly squandered.

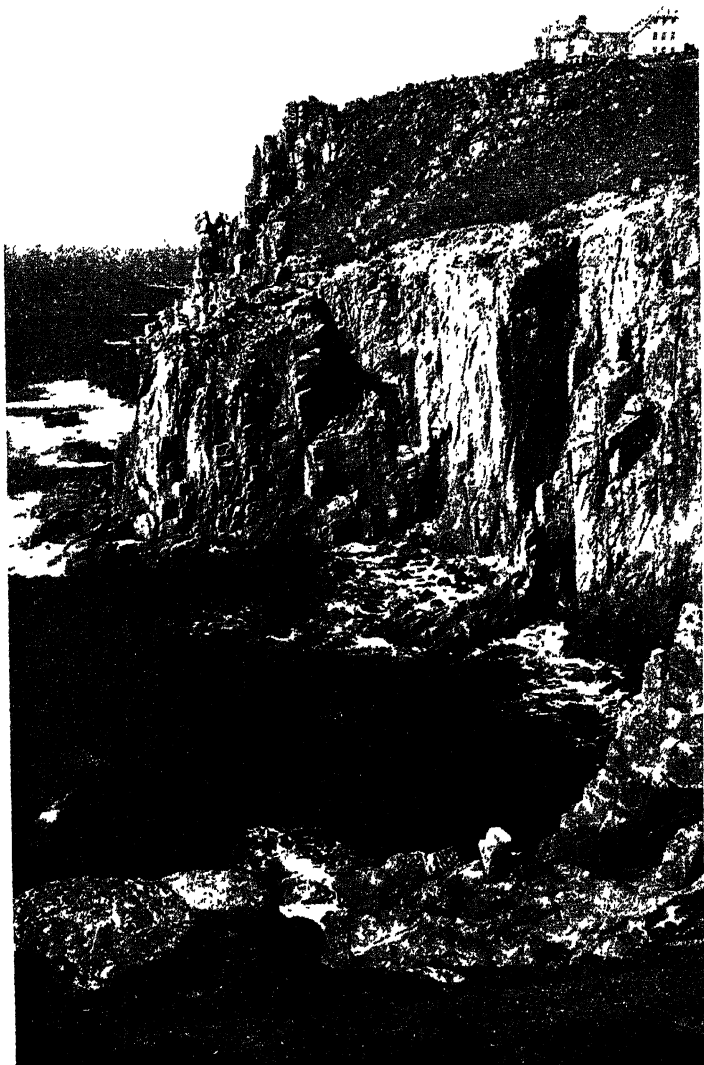
It may be, however, that the worst is passed. Thanks to our new resources, we are better able to ruin the countryside, and even the towns, than our fathers were, but on the other hand we are far more alive to the consequences of such ruin than they were. They behaved like spendthrifts who had just come into a vast inheritance. There is beginning to work in us a conscience

they never knew. The battle for the preservation of beautiful Britain has now begun. As I write this, there has just arrived the latest monthly report of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. (And I hope that readers of this fine volume, who will have no excuse for not realizing what there is to preserve, will do everything they can to help the Council.) This report tells us on how many fronts the battle is now being fought. We need not travel far to understand the strength of the enemy, for traces of his huge marauding hand are everywhere. What we should understand is that he can be—and is being—manfully resisted. The Council takes care of all the larger questions. We should take care of the smaller, more local ones ourselves. Being a heritage, the beauty of this island is also a trust. Our children and their children after them must live in a beautiful country. That is something we can all leave them, if we fight to preserve it now. It must be a country still happily compromising between Nature and Man, blending what was best worth retaining from the past with what best represents the spirit of our own age, a country as rich in noble towns as it is in trees, birds, and wild flowers.

In the chapters that follow, with their magnificent wealth of illustration, we are taken to almost every corner of our native land, and are shown all its natural and man-made treasures. This is a work that should delight the enthusiast, and convert the sceptic. I believe it will persuade many readers to explore their own country. If those readers will also decide that this bright enchantment must not perish but must be allowed to cast its spell on unborn generations of our countrymen, then this book will have done a great work. Thus hoping, I leave you to enjoy it.



10 WINTER ON LOCH HOURN, INVERNESS-SHIRE: THE KNOYDART HILLS BEYOND



11 THE CLIFFS OF LAND'S END, CORNWALL

Edmund Vale

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ENGLAND & WALES  
COASTWISE

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I THINK a great number of people regard our coastline as so much geography. That is a great mistake. For one thing, its study offers the solution to most of the major crises in our history. For another, it is the key to our system of economics. Lastly—a more difficult thing to gauge—it has a subtle beauty about it that has supplied the national mentality with the most powerful elements of its imagination since the Celts of the Iron Age, arriving before Julius Caesar, introduced their slogan ‘While the sea lasts, so long lasts the Briton’.

Every coastline has three creative elements which might be summed up as follows:

How the land is laid.

What the land is made of.

What can be made of the land.

And these points concern the seaman no less than the



## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

landsman. For on the lie of the land he depends for making contact with it by cliff, cove and river entrance. On what it is made of he depends for holding ground for his anchors, for beaching ground for his boats, and for fishing grounds. On what can be made of the land he depends for his cargoes of minerals, of produce, and of products; and in old days he depended on it for the very hulls and spars of his ships. In short, if you would get the most out of a coastline you must not only see the sea from the land with your eyes, but you must also train your imagination to see the land from the sea.

The towns and villages along the coast need some exercise of the imagination, too. They differ enormously from the towns and villages inland, although modern conditions have done much to eliminate the old obvious distinctions of local colour. It is not only that all shop-fronts and pavements and houses of entertainment are much the same wherever you go: the ports themselves, with their essential settings and equipment, have become vastly altered in the last few years, for the German submarine broke the normal trend of evolution in our shipping and forced us into a mechanization of all craft. The fishing village has now in many cases become the 'seaside resort', alive in the summer, ruled by a matriarchy of apartment-letters, and totally dead in the winter. The local fisherman is a rarity, and the local shipowner and boat-builder almost non-existent.

I think our small ports have suffered more severe handicaps both to their prosperity and their beauty in the last two decades than any other towns and villages in the whole country. And this has only to a small degree been due to the Great Slump. It seems but a short while ago that you could tell a seaport blindfold. Each one

had a rousing smell, evoked by three olfactory elements—tar, rope, and new shavings. These flavoured the sea air and brought out its true briny tang. They were present because there was always at least one small sailing-ship tied up to the quay wall; there were carpenters and riggers at work, and probably a ship being built on the local stocks. If you opened your eyes you would see fishermen spreading nets to dry or preparing long lines. The harbour would be full of their small craft afloat or aground. There would be a sail-loft, in which the sail-maker was never idle, and a ship-chandler, on whose premises you would find a man who would waive your value as a customer for the privilege of having you as a listener to his sea stories. Nearly every male in the port would have been to sea or be expecting to go, and everyone would watch the weather carefully for the sake of relations who were away on the great element.

In those days a coastal district would still get half its coal and general merchandise by sea. Nowadays that demand is still there, but the stuff comes by rail or road. Through a whole variety of circumstances the small sailing-ship has been beaten off the sea when there was no real need for this to happen. So local enterprises in shipbuilding have become derelict, sail-makers' lofts and chandlers' yards have been turned into garages, fishing craft into yachts and pleasure boats, and picturesque seamen's dwellings into week-end cottages.

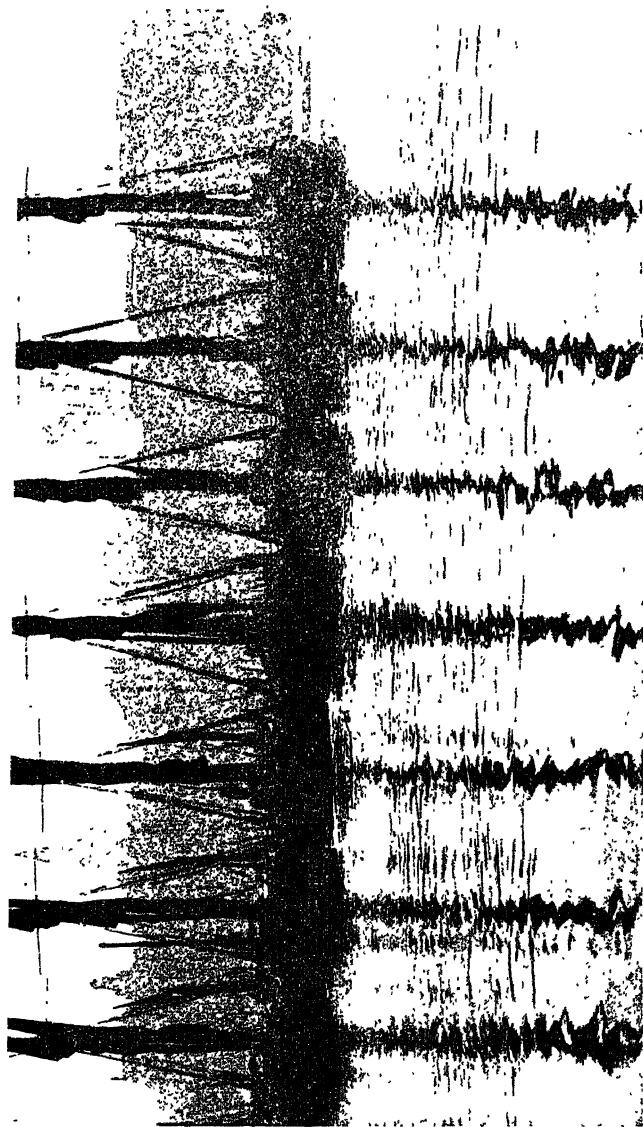
I hope and believe that a real revival in small craft will come. There is still a strong and virile root of tradition left at nearly all our small ports which would give out its old branches and fruits again in response to the right stimulus. And the sightseer may by his art find out this root and fill up the gaps I have indicated with his

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

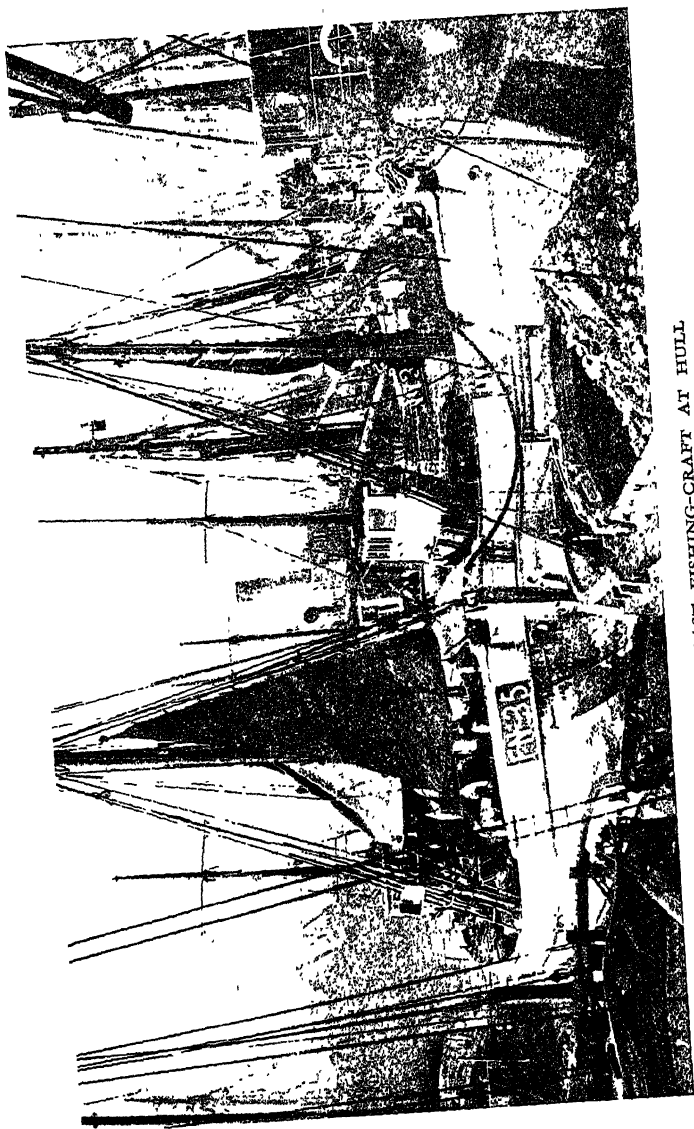
imagination. If he does so he will have the reward of feeling that peculiar glamour which our sea-coast towns and villages still yield, even though their glory may be depleted or their appearance totally altered.

It is typically British to write romances and poetry about all seas except our own. In fact, so little is said about our home waters out of school hours that their entity as seas hardly exists in the imagination of the people. Considered internationally, it is true that there is no sea to compare with the Mediterranean for romance. But next it I would place the Irish Sea, and judged on this same standard of romance (meaning a proportionate mixture of history and natural beauty) I would find the South Seas a long way behind it.

The Irish Sea seems to have missed its place in the sun of British topography and publicity, chiefly because all the voyages which are made across it are mainly undertaken in the night-time. But think of its coastline! It is surrounded in amazingly well-calculated proportions by all the partner nations of the British Isles. Each stands round it holding up a representative bit of scenery like deputies in council: Wales with its Snowdon range and estuaries of Conway and Clwyd; England with her highest mountain group and estuaries of Dee, Mersey, Ribble, and Duddon; Scotland with her Galloway mountains and peaks of Arran, the Firth of Clyde, and her share of the Solway. Then come Northern Ireland with her Mourne Mountains and lochs of Carlingford and Strangford, the Irish Free State with the Wicklow Mountains (only just out of bounds), the sweeps of Dublin and Dundalk Bays and the estuary of the Boyne. Lastly, set in the very midst, is the ancient little kingdom of the Manx people with its compact regalia of mountain and river scenery.



12 THAMES BARGES ON THE MEDWAY AT ROCHESTER



13 EAST COAST FISHING-CRAFT AT HULL

But now to our task of making a rapid survey of the coasts of England and Wales. Let us begin at the Solway Firth, and go down the east coast of the Irish Sea. There are five essential features here which always impress the eye on the ordinary small-scale map of, say, a railway time-table or a school atlas. They are the Cumbrian promontory, Morecambe Bay, the Fylde, Liverpool Bay, and the north coast of Wales. We will take them in turn.

The Cumbrian promontory, consisting politically of Cumberland, North Lancashire, and a tiny corner of Westmorland, has a very solid reason for standing out a little from the mainland into the waters of the Irish Sea. It contains the whole of the English massif of mountains. Here, concentrated in a single area, known as the Lake District, are the hardest of the English rocks, the highest of the English summits, and the loveliest settings of English scenery—made up of a rich blend of estuary, woodland, river, lake, and mountain. But the rocks are not all hard. The dark blue and grey Silurians give place to districts of white limestone and to districts of red Triassic sandstone. These contrasts would have served to complete the beauty of the scene if it had not been that they gave access to great mineral wealth in the shape of coal and iron. So the country is divided between triumphs of Nature in the raw and triumphs of man working up Nature into economics at the expense of her beauty.

The Solway coast is flat, edged with great stretches of salt marsh, which loses itself in the sandy runnels of the Firth. Huge herds of cattle feed here, and the weird-wistful atmosphere is the same as that conjured by Kingsley in his poem on the Sands o' Dee. In like

manner, too, the swift tides of the Solway have taken a heavy toll of youths and maidens who went out to 'drive the cattle home'. But these flat shores are dominated from a short distance inland by the great northern rampart of the Lake District, Skiddaw, whose summit reaches 3,053 feet.

The chief ports of the south shore of the Solway are Silloth, Workington, Maryport, and Whitehaven. Silloth is a port of general merchandise and has a large import trade in cattle from Ireland. It is a typical Irish Sea port, and there are regular sailings from it to Dublin, Liverpool, and the Isle of Man. The other three owe their being to the proximity of the coal-mines and to the iron-works. The bone-white limestone cliffs of Whitehaven make a strange contrast with the prolific colouring matter in smoke and coal-dust that smirches the place itself. At Maryport there is a fishing industry.

St. Bee's Head, which is the corner-stone of the Solway and the open sea, is a deep red, being made of Triassic sandstone. From here to the Duddon Estuary the coast is almost as straight as a ruler, having throughout the greater part of its length a fine bevel of golden sand on which Seascale bases its claims as a seaside resort. From seaward this coast is very lovely, for it has as its background the king of English mountains, Scawfell, with its crest rising 3,150 feet. In bright contrast to its purple bulk, the shore foreground is stippled with a long range of sand-dunes. Through these the rivers Esk, Irt, and Mite come down, and, having cut amazingly flamboyant curves among them, join in one mouth at Ravenglass, which was a Roman port, and where still a few small coasters come.

Between the Duddon Estuary and Morecambe Bay is

the district of Furness, whose name, although ancient (and spelt oddly according to our present notions of orthography), has very pertinent reference to its key-notes of to-day. It has been celebrated throughout history for its rich woodlands above the soil and its rich deposits of iron (in the form of hematite) below it. In the old days the iron was dug and the trees, having been felled and reduced to charcoal, were used to smelt it. These smelting-furnaces were known as 'bloomeries', but while they were sufficiently important to enrich the land-owners and peasantry of that countryside, and the two great monasteries of Furness and Conishead, and to create charcoal-burning and shipping industries, they were not large enough to interfere with its amenities in natural beauty. It was not possible in those days to smelt iron with coal or coke fires. The discovery of how to do this was made in the mid-eighteenth century. Then great blast-furnaces began to be built and the coal-fields were rapidly developed. The local supply of iron ore proved insufficient and was augmented by imports from abroad which, in the end, actually superseded it.

It was one of the first great iron-masters, John Wilkinson, a native of these parts, who made the first iron ship. He had a long and tiresome task to convince the world that a ship not made of wood could float. Also he invented the boring machine which made Watt's steam engine commercially practicable. These two factors revolutionized the shipping industry. His foundries had been in other parts of England, but he returned to his native district to die. There, according to his wishes, he was buried in an iron coffin under an iron memorial weighing 20 tons. But the industry of the great port near which he was born and died, indirectly made possible



by his efforts, should be his true memorial. Barrow-in-Furness, with its shipbuilding yards, and repair yards, and docks, and arsenals, and blast-furnaces, and foundries, is indeed a wonderfully graphic expression of the economic history and the native genius of the Cumbrian promontory.

Morecambe Bay, whose name still stands as given it by the Romans, except for the alteration of one letter, has long been famous for its shallowness. In the days of slower transport there used to be a short-cut across it at low tide from Bolton-le-Sands to Cartmel. It was a tricky business and required a guide, which office was performed by a hermit until the Reformation, later by someone appointed by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. In spite of that there were many accidents. But the sands, though disastrous to landsmen, were highly profitable to the small mariner, and Morecambe Bay is still famous for its race of fisherfolk. Flatfish, shrimps, and cockles are the yield of the sands. The local type of sailing-boat developed here was the Morecambe Bay nobbie, a trim cutter-rigged little craft just deep enough to hold her own to windward, and stiff enough to stand the short, quick waves of this dangerous inlet.

A little inland, on the south of Morecambe Bay, stands Lancaster on its namesake river, the Lune. The old town is happily just far enough away from any of the centres of Lancashire industry to be able to keep its old-world looks. It is all built of yellow stone, being situated just off the limestone and on the Millstone Grit rocks. The Lune comes down through lovely country at the base of that remarkable hill of Ingleborough, one of the chief glories of Lancastrian topography. It is a

river well loved by the salmon-fisher. But it does something for commerce also, as we shall see. The town of Morecambe is situated at the southernmost corner of the Bay. It divides with Blackpool the honours of refreshing the mill-jaded inhabitants of the South Lancashire towns, especially during their weeks of festivity known as the *wakes*. It has, in addition to its splendid sands, an unrivalled view of the mountains of the Lake District over the water, which lie in the sunset like unique creations of romance.

Just round the promontory is Heysham. It is here that the River Lune goes out to sea, making a great scour in the sand-flats called Heysham Lake. Advantage of this was taken by the Midland Railway early in this century, and they built a large tidal harbour at Heysham and opened a nightly service of steamers to Belfast, which is now operated by the L.M.S. It is likely that there was a trade route to Ireland from here in the past, for at the old village of Heysham there stands a ruined early Norman chapel dedicated to St. Patrick. A remarkable graveyard surrounds it, for the whole of the sandstone rock is excavated, not with the shapes of graves but with the shapes of coffins, each sepulchre answering a double purpose.

Between the Lune and the Ribble there is a low-lying district called the Fylde—an ancient local name not found on maps. Behind it rises a rim of hills known by the general name of the Fells. They are the south-west edge of the Yorkshire Moors, very wild, and very bleak, but full of a curious romance. The road into the heart of the moors goes over by a shallow pass called the Trough of Bowland—part of the old royal forest of Bowland, in which wild bulls ranged. Tales about the

ferocity of these animals still linger in the lonely farms of the district.

But the Fylde is the very reverse in nature and climate from its wild hinterland. It is a very fertile district, catching the mild weather of the Gulf Stream in the winter. It used to be famous for breeding shire horses, but now it goes in whole-heartedly for poultry, a strange, if profitable come-down. It has two coast-towns of importance, Fleetwood with its large industry in trawling and fish-curing, and Blackpool with its unique trade in holiday-making.

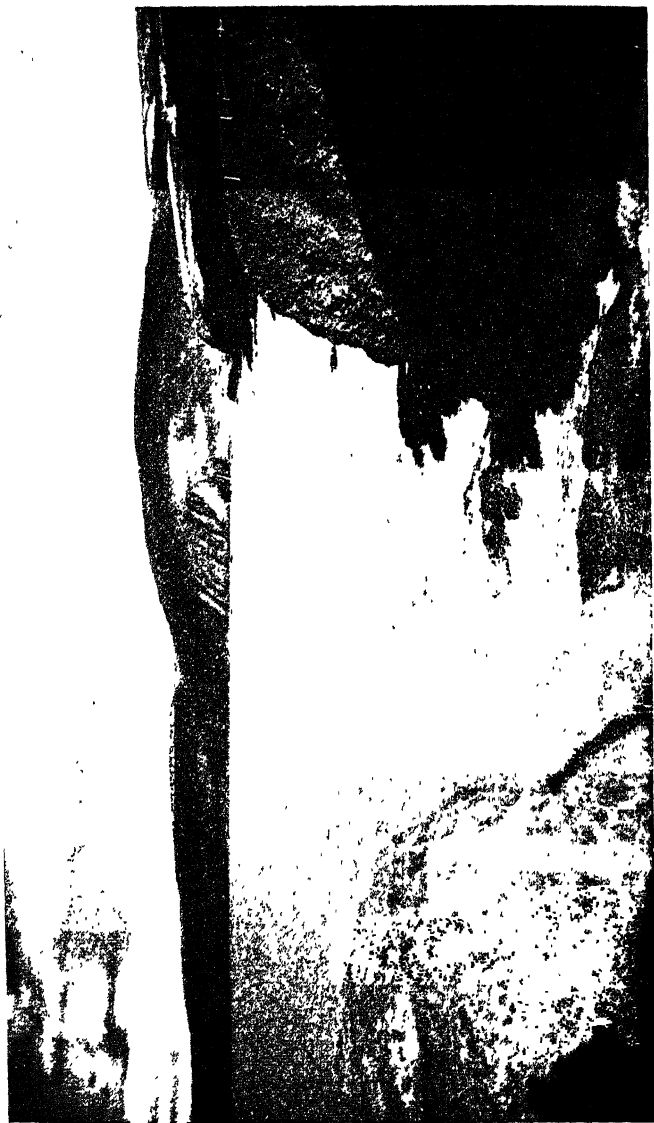
The Fylde is bounded on the south by the Ribble, a river which is navigable as far as Preston by fairly large steamers. Preston, distinguished locally from others of that name by being called 'Proud Preston', is the focus of a large cotton-weaving industry which makes the trade for its shipping. It was here that the first of the two great Jacobite rebellions, which set forth in 1711 to place the Old Pretender on the throne of England, was held up by forces under the command of the Duke of Marlborough.

South of the Ribble's mouth Liverpool Bay begins. The district, for a wonder, has no local name, perhaps because it had no prominence till Southport became fashionable in the nineteenth century. It is as flat as Holland. Southport is built on the sand of a sea that appears to be forsaking it. The inhabitants of this cheerful watering-place, when they can claim more than one generation's residence, call themselves 'sand-grounders' and are jealous of the distinction.

Liverpool Bay turns its corner at the division of Lancashire and Cheshire, where the two rivers of Mersey and Dee open their wide estuaries on either side of a



14 HOLYHEAD, ANGLESEY: THE SOUTH STACK LIGHTHOUSE



15 THE CARDIGANSHIRE COAST NEAR ABERPORTH

high sandstone promontory called the Wirral Peninsula. To sailors the Dee is still known as 'the Chester River', and on that name hangs the key to the whole story of this part of the coast.

The Romans made Chester one of the three great legionary fortresses of Britain. The early Normans made it the centre of a county palatine and the seat of a bishop. After the peace with Wales it thrived on its market, and when trade with Ireland developed it became a great port. In those days Liverpool was named as 'a creek in the port of Chester'. But the Dee began to silt up. By the eighteenth century the Irish packet and other regular shipping no longer sailed from the old water-tower in the walls of Chester but from an out-port in the Dee Estuary at Parkgate. In the early nineteenth century Parkgate bid fair to grow into a seaport of commercial importance, but almost simultaneously Holyhead blossomed out into the premier port for Ireland, owing to the making of Telford's new mail-coach road, and the Industrial Revolution in South Lancashire named Liverpool as its principal outlet. With these competitors the expense of dredging operations was not worth while, and the Sands o' Dee were allowed to take their course. But, to the visitor in Wirral, the charm of Parkgate is that wistful look of faded expectations in its quayside and older buildings. This lies like a theme behind the beauty of its view towards the Welsh hills and its amazing sunsets, in which Turner delighted.

The fact that Liverpool was in the port of Chester hampered its progress till the end of the seventeenth century. Its first trade booms were in tobacco from Virginia and sugar and rum from the West Indies. Then came the cotton and, of course, the trade in black ivory.

It was a pioneer in the matter of docks and a hundred years ahead of London in this respect. The Bridgewater Canal from Manchester (1763, our first canal) increased its trade. But the Manchester Ship Canal, which was dug to the Mersey a little over a hundred years later, naturally diminished it, though not to any serious extent.

Opposite Liverpool, on the Cheshire shore of the Mersey, is Birkenhead, with its docks and the great building yard of Cammel Laird, from which that famous and romantic ship the *Alabama* was stolen by friends of the Confederates during the North and South War in America. Behind Birkenhead is Wirral, with its watering places of Hoylake and West Kirby. In spite of its proximity to one of the greatest industrial areas in England the peninsula remains charmingly rural. It is even genuinely 'old-world'. A sort of milk of kindness seems to overflow into it from the wide dairy plain of Cheshire which preserves its ancient spirit inviolate.

The south shore of Liverpool Bay is the coast of North Wales. Along it are mustered ranges of mountains which rise higher and higher till the peak of Snowdon is reached. These mountains are rendered all the more beautiful from the sea as their valleys run from south to north and empty into it, thus separating out the individual heights. The Vale of Clwyd has Rhyl at its mouth, the castle of Rhuddlan is on the estuary, and the old village-city of St. Asaph at the head of its tidal waters. In one sweeping embrace from Rhyl comes Colwyn Bay and Llandudno. The latter lies under the shelter of an immense headland of limestone called the Great Orme. On the far side of it the Conway Valley opens into the division between the greater and the lesser highlands of North Wales. At its mouth is the town and port of

Conway which preserves not only its magnificent castle but the whole of its medieval town walls intact.

Between Penmaenmawr and Llanfairfechan there stood one of the most imposing headlands of all our coastline. But it has been industrialized by quarrymen and is now much depleted in grandeur. Its bulk, which was the terror of travellers and the joy of artists, is dispersed as kerb-stones, *pavé* sets, and railway ballast over half England. The Valley of the Ogwen has Bangor near its mouth, a cathedral and university city. The Valley of the Saint, flanked by Snowdon, opens to the sea at Carnarvon, whose harbour, under the walls of the largest Edwardian castle, is one of the most picturesque of our ports.

The two last valleys do not meet the salt water at the open sea but in the confined waters of the Menai Straits, where the swift tides flow through meadowed and wooded shores between Carnarvonshire and the Isle of Anglesey. The coast of this island deserves a chapter all to itself. It is a study in small scenery, amenable to the artist but not to the photographer. The clear air and peculiar sky-effects show off the tiny gems of foreground, while the background setting is the chief rampart of the mountains of Cambria. The people are an optimistic race, their Geography having saved them from History, for they have been out of the way of all the wars, industrial booms, and depressions, and have not known either famine, rapine, or poverty. The Celt does not readily take to the sea, but makes a first-class sailor when he gets there. And there is a strong seafaring tradition in Anglesey.

At the mountain-headland of Holyhead the Irish Sea terminates and St. George's Channel begins, and I have



dealt in bird's-eye fashion with the British coast of this Sea elsewhere in the book, under *Wales*, so I would now take the reader to the country south of the Bristol Channel.

In the coast that we have been dealing with the dominant note was the Irish Sea. The story of its towns and villages, its people and their industries is bound up with Ireland, the West Indies, the United States, and Canada. There is a subtle difference about the next bit of coastline which compels me to treat of it as having a dominant land note. The people of Somerset, Dorset, Devon, and Cornwall, are as markedly individual in themselves as any folk bounded by county prejudices can be. But they have one common bond—they all belong to the West Country. The seafaring tradition of the great peninsula of England is not of the New World but the Old. Cornwall traded with the Phoenicians, Bristol grew rich on the merchandise of the Levant, Southampton on that of Venice; it was the men of Devon who humbled the power of Spain.

There is a peculiar mellowness about Bristol which seems to express a consciousness that she is mistress of the secrets of the Old World. Not that she did not thrive on the slave trade and the sugar plantations of the West Indies! But her foundations lie in a deeper stratum of the past. She is both the gate of the West Country and typical of everything to do with it.

The Somerset coast is rich in contrast. It has leagues of dead level horizon, where Sedgemoor comes down to Bridgwater Bay, and leagues of hilly skyline. It is the Mendips with their white gorges and escarpments which rise above Clevedon and Weston-super-Mare. On the other side of Sedgemoor the rock is red and builds the



16 A NORTH DEVON ESTUARY: THE RIVER TAW, NEAR BARNSTAPLE



17 A CORNISH COVE: GORRAN HAVEN

Quantocks first, and then the heights of Exmoor. There is a sparkle about the Quantock coast scenery that might not inaptly be compared to lilting music, for the charming shapes of the small hills and valleys and the brilliant colouring on all sides give an impression of liveliness, as if something were *going on* in the heart and mind of the scenery. Watchet, Dunster, and Minehead are the Quantock towns. Lynton and Ilfracombe (both in North Devon) are under the heights of Exmoor.

It is a dramatic point where the low flats all along the wide stretch of Bridgwater Bay are broken by the wooded mass of the North Hill at Minehead, which, at Bossington Beacon, dominates the east of Porlock Bay. The great tableland of Exmoor plunges to the sea in steep secluded combes, but the sweep from Lynmouth to Countisbury Foreland (720 feet) is a curve of great stately cliffs. Westward is an incomparable range of wooded heights and deep combes to Combe Martin—Lee Bay, Woody Bay, and the 1,000 feet of the Great and Little Hangman. The slashed gap of Heddon's Mouth hides the Hunter's Inn, but to the glorious sylvan curve of Woody Bay, finest of all, access has recently been difficult or impossible. Past Ilfracombe come Bull Point and Morte Point, where the coast turns from the Bristol Channel to the open Atlantic.

Round the corner come Morte Bay and Bideford Bay. Here the scenery takes on a sterner character as the nature of the rock changes from the Devonian Sandstone to the Millstone Grit and the coast lies open to the Western Ocean. Blackmore in his *Lorna Doone* focused the romance of Exmoor, and Kingsley in his *Westward Ho!* the romance of Bideford Bay. Bideford town, at the mouth of the Torridge, serves Lundy Island with

provisions and mails. This island since Norman times has been held direct from the King. It preserves its own law and order and is not subject to the Acts of the British Parliament. How blessed to be free of income-tax, education, and customs and excise! It is the most striking of all our west-coast islands except Ailsa Craig. But, whereas Ailsa Craig is a pyramid, Lundy is a parallelogram, raising its table-top several hundreds of feet sheer out of the sea on granite walls. The top affords roomy and excellent pasture. But it not infrequently happens that 'the kine as they lazily feed' get blown off the edge.

Steeply situated on the west of Bideford Bay is Clovelly, a Mecca of tourism. The western horn of the Bay is Hartland Point, a stark cliff of brown Millstone Grit reared up 350 feet, with a trim, gleaming Trinity lighthouse perched on a ledge of it. A few miles from here we are in Cornwall, on what Tennyson calls quite aptly 'the thundering shores of Bude and Boss', the latter place having been shortened by poet's licence from Boscastle. Just below its romantic little rock-bound harbour comes that imposing cape which is the cornerstone of all Arthurian legend—Tintagel Head. Let us not vex the soul of romance by inquiring too closely into the warrant of archaeology for associating the ruin of the brave castle on Tintagel with the King of Chivalry.

Just inland from the coast lies the most elevated part of Cornwall, Bodmin Moor, with its highest point on a hill which once bore a high-sounding Celtic name that is now anglicized into Brown Willie. On these moors rises the River Camel which flows down to Padstow. The Arthurians, of course, have seized on the name of this river to prove a Camelot.

We are now back on the Devonian Sandstone rocks, to which Trevoise Head belongs and the cliff above which Newquay is situated. It is just below St. Ives Bay that the coastal granite begins. The fishing industry has benefited St. Ives through an unusual by-product—picturesqueness. On this account it has become an artists' colony, which probably makes easier money for the town than fishing.

We are now on the great granitic toe of Cornwall. This, to my mind, is much the most Arthurian and romantic part of the Duchy. Here on the wild moors of Zennor, Bosoporthennis (spoken *Bosporennis*), and St. Just lie vast tangible relics of forgotten heroes—cromlechs, circles, beehive houses, inscribed stones, cairns, cairns, and rocking-stones. From hence, on a high hill-fort, you may look down on St. Michael's Mount and away over the sea to the dim blue tops of the lost Kingdom of Lyonesse, known to-day as the Isles of Scilly. You may see at the same time the lone sea-girt lighthouses of Seven Stones, Wolf Rock, and the Longships, which last lies off Land's End, and if you go down into Zennor Church you may see a real portrait carved on a pew-end of one of the worst terrors to mariners before those lighthouses were set up—the mermaid. This one used to sing in Zennor Cove, and they probably put her in the church because she brought so much trade to the parishioners in the shape of good wrecks.

The south coast of Cornwall is much richer in harbours than the north, and the lie of the land there has always offered more trade. The ancient tin-mining is far gone in senile decrepitude in spite of modern appliances, but the china-clay industry goes on (china-clay is a product of decomposed granite), and the glittering shoals

of pilchard still come by in the summer months. So all the principal civic settlements are here, Penzance, Falmouth, Truro, and Fowey ('Q's' *Troy Town*), and, lastly, Devonport on the bank of the border stream, Tamar, where it falls into Plymouth Sound.

Plymouth Sound, with its creeks, is not only one of the most spacious but also one of the most usefully disposed natural harbours of all our coastline. It has been a deciding factor in our insular integrity and also our supremacy of the seas since the early sixteenth century. No other inlet except the Thames has been so pivotal in our history. Plymouth and Devonport, between them, share the honours of the Sound and the fruits of the Naval industry which Drake introduced.

Seen from the sea, Plymouth appears to be crowned by the blue dome of a mountain. That is Dartmoor, which, alone of all hills on the south coast, achieves mountain status. If you believe that a mountain begins at 2,000 feet, then Dartmoor gets 28 feet above the mark in Yes Tor and 39 in High Willhayes Tor. But this pseudo-mountain has done something more for Plymouth and for our shipping in general than just making a beautiful background. It is a mass of granite, and that material also lies in loose boulders upon the moor. Had it not been for this fact it would not have occurred to Smeaton to try it for his lighthouse on the Eddystone Rock, which lies far out in Plymouth Bay, and on which no one had succeeded in placing a tower that would withstand the waves. Granite had not been tried for building before that time, as in the mass it was thought to be too intractable. But here *moorstone*, as it was called, was loose and handy. Smeaton's success showed that granite was the *only* material for rock lighthouses.

Now comes the 'thickening of the knee' of the peninsula of the West Country with the four famous points of Devonshire, Bolt Tail, Bolt Head, Prawle Point, and Start Point. They are main departures and landfalls for all Channel navigators. The way in to Salcombe lies in the midst of them, and round the corner, at the opening of Lyme Bay, is the way into Dartmouth. Thereafter follows the red-cliffed arena of Tor Bay, with Brixham—from whence came the notable invention of trawling for fish—Paignton, and Torquay. Then come the red pinnacles of Dawlish and the entrance to the Exe. This coast, one would think, ought to be called England's Riviera, and not Cornwall. At the heart of this bay of resorts lie Sidmouth and Lyme Regis, where the cliffs are an unctuous blue. The reason for this is the exposure of the Lias clay belt which goes in a thin continuous band right across England, meeting the sea again at Whitby.

This thin, blue line yields the ornate spiral fossil called *ammonite* and also the complete raw material for the making of concrete. Lyme has left it to others to take commercial advantage of both these riches. The Midlanders work the lias up into Portland cement and Whitby has exploited the ammonites since the Middle Ages. Three ammonites are to be found on the ancient arms of Whitby Abbey and also on the present arms of the town: the odd fact being that the ammonite was considered a throw-out of Creation, a snake whose design had not pleased the Almighty, and had therefore never been completed beyond the body stage. The ever ingenious and enterprising people of Whitby conceived the idea of completing these unfinished works of Nature by carving heads on them at the required place and selling them as mystic



curiosities called *snake-stones*. When their local supply of ammonites grew thin, they actually sent to Lyme Regis for several shiploads.

Between Charmouth and the curious little port of West Bay, which is Bridport's advance guard to the sea, is a region of tremendous headlands—Stonebarrow Hill, Golden Cap, and Thorncombe Beacon above Eype. They are of mottled yellow sands and fall some 500 feet to the beach, with an undercliff which is spring-soaked and toilsome to clamber along, something towards a quicksand. If neighbour Lyme makes a show of great ammonites these abound in the pencil-like 'darts' of the belemnites. They were believed to be thunderbolts when the snake-stones were in vogue, though actually they are bony fragments of the humble cuttle-fish which swarmed in the Jurassic Sea.

Lyme Bay is rounded off to the east by the Chesil Beach, one of the seven wonders of the British coastline. This enormous bastion of shingle has to be seen to be believed. It is said to be caused by the prevailing sou'-westerly weather combined with a prevailing easterly tide-set. It has made a causeway out to the Isle of Portland, whose stone Sir Christopher Wren popularized by building St. Paul's Cathedral of it. This became the hall-mark of the Renaissance Period, thereby giving an important industry to the Portlanders.

In the shelter of the Chesil Beach Weymouth has grown up into a port for the Channel Islands and a seaside resort. A huge portrait of her patron in the second phase, George III, is seen a little farther on, cut in the chalk downs, riding on horseback towards London. Eastward again is another of the seven wonders, in the shape of Lulworth Cove, with its perfect little natural



18 THE CHALK CLIFFS OF BEER HEAD, SOUTH DEVON



19 THE CHALK CLIFFS OF SUSSEX: THE 'SEVEN SISTERS', NEAR SEAFORD

harbour, like a thing in a dream, and its fossil forest. From Lulworth Cove to Kimmeridge Ledges is a piece of impressive coastland, as diversified as its geology, but hardly accessible, and little known. In the wide curve of Worbarrow Bay the chalk Purbecks take their sea-plunge, the barrow which gives the place its name having been half eroded away. The natives say that all would have vanished but for the protective little promontory hillock of Jurassic limestone called in the local idiom 'Warbarrow Tout'. There are the high white cliffs of Arishmell Gap, and, beyond Kimmeridge, the oily shales with traces of more than one unsuccessful effort at industrial exploitation.

The heads of St. Alban's and Durlston owe their projection into the sea to the presence of the Purbeck Hills, which stand in the background. Here, again, the Church has been a time-honoured patron of an important local industry. Cathedrals as far afield as St. Patrick's, Dublin, are graced with shafts of Purbeck marble from these quarries. The next bay opens with Swanage and that interesting small inland sea called Poole Harbour. A little farther on is Bournemouth, the last word in coast-town development, and its neighbour, Christchurch, that with its priory and its ancient harbour was in its prime in Norman days. But in the background, and even on the foreshore now, right up to Southampton, Norman memories remain sustained by a shred of Norman custom in that still unspoilt area, the New Forest.

Southampton has had a history similar to Bristol. She has traded with the same Mediterranean people, has had as strict a merchant guild, and very much the same ups and downs of fortune. But now Southampton has stolen a big march on her old rival. It was Liverpool

which took the trade from Bristol. To-day it is Southampton which is taking the trade from Liverpool. Southampton has two things which make her unique among our ports. One is a double tide caused by a retardation of Atlantic water flowing down through the North Sea and Straits of Dover, the other is that out of all her immense system of docks only one of them is closed between the times of high water. The other docks and quays are all open, which saves much delay in berthing and getting under way.

The Isle of Wight, which so usefully protects Southampton Water from both wind and wave, is quite a world of its own and has managed to crowd into its lozenge-shaped area a whole epitome of English coastal scenery in miniature, bar that of the harder rocks. On Sandown Bay the white chalk of Culver Cliff adjoins the ruddy earth of Redcliff; the other horn is formed by the sandy headland of Dunnose. There are flat marshy stretches, towering landmarks like St. Catherine's Point, landslips, chines, undercliffs, and the coloured sands of Alum Bay.

From here to the Straits of Dover there is much beauty though not a great deal of variety in the coast scenery. From Portsdown Hill behind Portsmouth to the Forelands it is all chalk country. Its strongest accents are in the great rolling South Downs, which reach their outstanding though not their highest point in Chanctonbury Ring (773 feet) behind Worthing, and the chalk cliffs of Brighton, Beachy Head, and Dover.

Eastward from Selsey Bill the coast is low and flat, dotted by seaside resorts of increasing dimensions, and above the fine bold cliffs west of Newhaven sits the ineffable Peacehaven. But beyond Seaford is the typical

downland Cuckmere Valley, and the switchback white headlands of the Seven Sisters, preserved from otherwise inevitable vulgarization. Much farther east the fine jumbled undercliff of Folkestone Warren precedes the chalk cliffs which dominate Dover Harbour, that time-honoured and still most vital link between England and the rest of Europe.

A striking contrast in this historic bit of coastline is the shingle foreland of Dungeness and the great level area which lies behind it called Romney Marsh. This is the district of the famous old Cinque Ports, on whose fleets, until the fifteenth century, all our naval power was based. But the same causes which built up the barrier of the Chesil Beach ruined the approaches to the Cinque Ports (leaving them high and dry), and are, in fact, still carrying the promontory of Dungeness nearer to France by a measurable annual increase. The only Cinque Port still left open is Dover, which, but for the power of dredgers, would also have been closed. Julius Caesar landed on this part of the coast and the Romans in the last years of their occupation, apprehending the Continental danger, built their string of 'Saxon Shore' forts between Dover and Portsmouth, but Henghist and Horsa and William of Normandy found their way between these defences.

Turning out of the Straits of Dover, between the South and North Forelands is a strip of coast called 'The Downs'. Here, hemmed in by the treacherous Goodwin Sands, is a splendid and famous anchorage that one reads about in all fiction and history before the coming of steam navigation. It was always full of ships waiting for the wind to change, the reason being that if you sailed down the Thames with a fair wind, the same wind was

foul for entering the Channel, and if you had come down the Channel with a fair breeze, it would be against you for the London River. Deal, with its venturesome population of boatmen, thrive handsomely on these weatherbound fleets, and so did Ramsgate after it had built its haven of refuge.

The East Coast of England is very strikingly different from the coasts of west and south that we have touched on. But its beauties and points of historical and archaeological interest lie, with a few exceptions, inland. It is notoriously inhospitable to shipping both on account of the immense shoals which lie off the coast far out to sea, everywhere south of the Humber, and on account of the difficulty of finding shelter when the wind blows from the east, the Thames, the Harwich River, and the Humber being the only havens which can be entered with safety under all conditions. But this state of things has bred the hardest mariners and the best managers of small craft that could be found in all our seaboard. Less than a century ago the East Coast could boast between fifty and a hundred different types of sailing-boat evolved to fit the local conditions. But steam and oil have killed that fine tradition. Only a few survivors remain in the shape of the Yorkshire cobbles and the Humber keels, with certain yawls, smacks, and topsail schooners.

The types of scenery on the East Coast are not generally so striking as those on the west and south seaboard except in three places—the north coast of Norfolk, the Yorkshire coast, and the Northumberland coast. But while other parts are not so striking they have a strong and well-merited attraction for the lover of flat expanses and great skylscapes.

The creeks, estuaries, and islands of Essex form a

subject in themselves which cannot receive the scantiest justice here. They make up compositions which have the same power of simplicity and strength of quietness as Dutch pictures—landscapes of broad green pasture, with reedy dykes in place of hedges and great solid-built, red-tiled farms, called *halls*, a name for that type of house remaining from the Middle Ages. Across the rough sea-wall of earth and stones the blue salt water stretches to vague horizons, seeming larger and lonelier than elsewhere, even when wisps of smoke break the line of solitude. The islands like Foulness and Mersea, with its oyster fisheries—‘a wooded hill beyond a gleam of water’—are reached on causeways marked by poles. The masts of many yachts bristle up at Burnham on the Crouch and at Brightlingsea on the Colne, by the creek which St. Osyth’s Priory house dominates, and where the Stour estuary suddenly shrinks to the stream of Constable’s country.

The shores of the Wash, too, have their own muse of loneliness enriched for the poet by a deeper note of dejection. The sad sound of the sea flowing and ebbing over the great shoals seems to recall other losses than King John’s. For, only a hundred years ago, shipping could go all the way up the Nene to Northampton, in the heart of the Midlands, and the famous tower of Boston looked down on a busy quay.

But to come to the three bolder coast sectors I mentioned a page back. Cromer Head still projects nobly into the sea, though it is crumbling fast and has already lost one lighthouse. The hilly country about Sheringham is unique in its shapes and colouring under the bright keen air of the North Sea. Its hardy fishermen were pioneers in the design of our lifeboats, though the lines



which they laid down have a long pedigree reaching across the North Sea to Viking ancestors. On the beaches here you may pick up amber from the lost forests of the Dogger Bank.

The Yorkshire coast has fine cliff scenery culminating at Boulby Cliff (the Redcliff of sailors) which towers up 672 feet and is the highest cliff in England. Landward rises a rolling background of wolds and moors. In the midst of this scenery is Scarborough, which is undisputed 'queen of the East Coast watering-places'. Whitby, at the picturesque entrance of the Esk, has now to lean on the visitor for her trade. But in the days of the wooden ships she had a unique reputation in the building and manning of them. Among the many famous hulls which took the water here were the ships which Captain Cook ordered for his voyages of discovery.

From Scarborough northwards the coast gradually rises, broken by the dingles called *nykes*. At Ravenscar is a 600-foot tableland, where the cliffs drop in two stages, with a tangled footing haunted by foxes. It is not surprising that an attempted watering-place here, perched above a hardly accessible beach, failed to materialize. This headland gives a panorama of the lower sweep round Robin Hood's Bay, with the village jammed into a cleft under the farther headland. Similar little fishing-places are picturesquely tucked into stream-clefts under headlands on the other side of Whitby, notably Sandsend and Staithes, but Runswick Bay has terraced its houses on the slopes of a wide open curve.

The scenery of Northumberland is rather interesting than spectacular. On this coast lie the very picturesque fortified headland of Dunstanburgh, where the castle

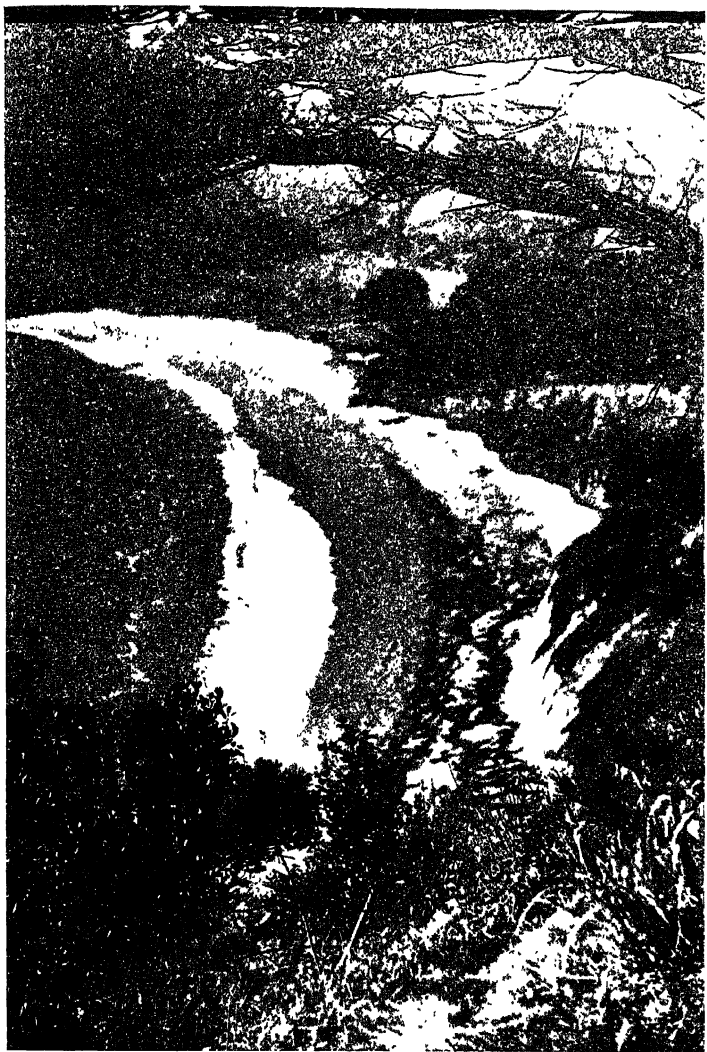
ruin, called quaintly by the sailors 'the snags of Dunstanburgh', crowns a menacing cliff of black columnar basalt, Bamburgh Island with its huge Norman castle, the Farne Islands, and Holy Island (the ancient Lindisfarne), where, in the seventh century, that amazing illuminated gospel which we still have intact was prepared.

The ports tend to be specialized in their trade. The only one which has had a long history in general trade like London, Southampton, Bristol, and Liverpool is Hull. It had its own Trinity House. Only within recent years has this ancient guild resigned its control of lights and pilotage to the Humber Conservancy Board. Grimsby, Immingham, and Goole are all modern products of railway enterprise. But the same power must be held responsible for taking the trade that used to belong to the port of Berwick-upon-Tweed—the monks of Melrose shipped their large consignments of wool from here. Sunderland and Newcastle-upon-Tyne are our oldest sources of coal—*sea-cole* as it used to be called. Edward I forbade the use of it in London by Act of Parliament for fear of fire, and the ports did not recover from this blow till Tudor times.

The iron of the Cleveland District, with the coal of Durham and Northumberland, has made great modern ports on the Tyne and Tees, and, incidentally, carried the shipping from Whitby to Tyneside. Yarmouth has the strangest story of all the ports. It was not founded by a local population but by a colony from the Cinque ports—Kentish men. And the Cinque Ports continued to rule the town almost up to Tudor times. Every year about Michaelmas the herring was fished, salted, and packed off to inland towns, and that whole season was

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called the Yarmouth Fair. At that time a contingent from the Cinque Ports arrived, which not only took part in the fishing but dispensed justice and laid down the law. No other fishing-port in the kingdom has held its own so long and so well, though, if you count oysters as fish, Colchester, which has lived from serving Roman emperors to serving American millionaires, goes one better.



20 A LITTLE BAY IN SOUTH DEVON: BLACKPOOL SANDS, NEAR  
DARTMOUTH



21 NEWTON LACY: A DEVON VILLAGE

Edmund Barber

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THE  
WEST COUNTRY

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ONE can get a lot of one's interests in life out of maps, admire cartographers immensely as a race, and yet feel that there are some things which they might do differently. They are too much obsessed, for instance, with this business of north and south. It is no doubt only natural that when you come to project the features of a spinning globe on to a flat surface, you should be chiefly concerned with the axis of spin; and, apart from Mercator's projection, there was that mysterious lure of the magnetic North which set the whole world of navigators, in their efforts to find their way about, looking in the same direction as the astronomers. One cannot help thinking, however, that it would be both pleasant and instructive if our map-makers would sometimes give the Pole-star a miss, disdain the points of the compass, and find us, for instance, a map to illustrate this book.

which boldly put its West at the top of the page. The trouble is that the idea of what the map of Britain 'looks like' becomes firmly imprinted on one's mind in early youth, and ever afterwards we are quite incapable of thinking of our own country except as a sort of Scottish wallaby with Wales in her pouch and Ireland just emerged. It is time that all west-thinking men protested against this. If we had the sort of map we should like, the flat lands of Lincoln and East Anglia might look more than ever like the extension of Holland that they are. The chalk downs of Kent and Sussex might have to confess themselves more evidently the spread of the cretaceous tail of prehistoric Europe, which the subsidence of the Channel river-bed had cut off, perhaps untimely. But there, plain for everyone to see, would be the great Archaean mass of Wales and the Western Highlands, infinitely older than the silt to the east of it, and the long peninsula of the West Country enwrapping the Dartmoor massif in its Old Red folds—would point up the page to the Atlantic chasm which tumbles down beyond the Scillies to depths that still are not recorded.

It is pleasant to think of this West Country of ours, with its long coastline fronting two seas and the open ocean, as though it were indeed a country in itself. And there are senses in which it always was so. For since prehistoric days, when the plain of Somerset was an area of marshes, lagoons, and occasional islands, and the communications consisted of trackways along the highest contours, there have been long periods when communication with the rest of England—particularly from Devon and from Cornwall—was far easier by sea than by land. There are still good West Country folk who make a practice—when opportunity offers—of taking the

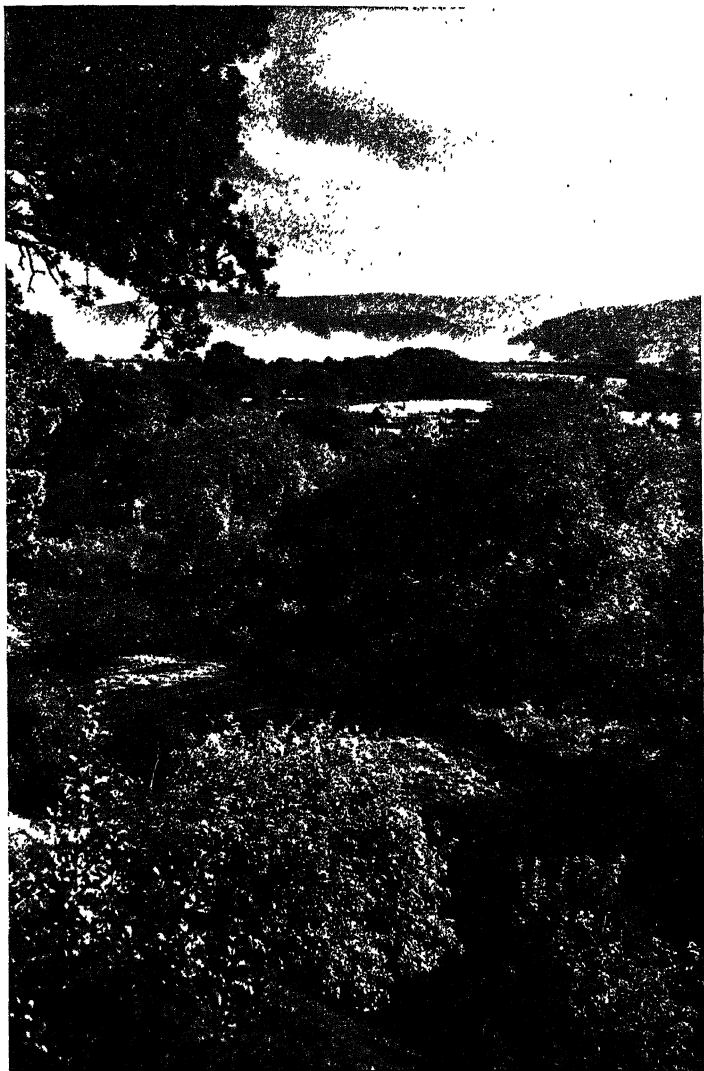
steamer from Plymouth or Falmouth to London; and the development of a really good system of land communication with the West, whether by road or by rail, is something distinctly modern. Nowadays we have two really fine railway services, both of them among the most comfortable in the world, and apart from the main motor roads, which are paved and shaved and graded for the benefit of our own cars, we can be carried to all parts of the West by motor-coaches from towns which have services on all their radial roads. This is a very different state of affairs from that which prevailed even a century ago. Most of the roads of Cornwall and Devon were still pack-horse tracks in the eighteenth century. They made along the watersheds, avoiding the steep fall of the streams and the many tidal estuaries, and only descended when absolutely necessary to some ford or medieval bridge. The main roads through Somerset and Dorset, where they lay low or passed through forest, were almost impassable; in some parts of these counties this remained true up to the time of railways. Indeed, we have only to think what so often happens to the roads of central Somerset when the Tone and the Parret are in flood to realize what communication with the West must have been before the beginning of last century.

The West Country of which I am writing is defined as consisting of Cornwall and Devon—to start at the top of the peninsula—Somerset and Dorset. It would be idle to suggest, of course, that the Duchy and the three counties have everything, including language, in common. They differ a great deal in stock, and vastly in landscape and climate even within their own individual borders. Could anything be more unlike the north and west



fringes of Dartmoor, shall we say, than the mild estuaries of East Devon so close at hand? And if Dorset, by Sherborne and Yeovil passes imperceptibly into one of the most beautiful tracts of Somerset, if you would find it extremely difficult, or even impossible, to say whether you were in Somerset or Devon at any spot between Simonsbath and Countygates, there is still a very strong and proper feeling in all of them. To many Cornishmen even Devonians are still foreigners in a more exclusive sense than that word possesses when used in other parts of England among neighbours. The three counties have perhaps more in common, though each has its own peculiar charm and flavour; or perhaps it would be better to say its blend of flavours. Cornwall, with its comparative lack of Saxon blood, its once traditional Celtic tongue, with its religious bias and its industrial mining area, and also because no part of it is ever farther than a few miles from the ocean, has a characteristic and individual tang which even Devon is nowadays too definitely bucolic to exhibit. Not that her fishermen are any less venturesome or less industrious than their fathers, or that her sailors are not as good men and true as ever came out of Portsmouth or Chatham; but the sea no longer plays so large a part in the economy of the West Country as it did in the days of Drake. The flavour of the land is not so salt as once it was.

The West Country, as we have been told times out of number, has certainly the most widely diversified scenery of any part of England. The broad, open, windswept moors of Devon and Cornwall are the complements of the deep combes, the villages unobservable from above, the narrow, overgrown lanes, the hidden farmsteads. The rolling downs of Dorset find their antiphony in the



22 HIGH SUMMER IN PORLOCK VALE, LOOKING TO EXMOOR



23 GATHERING STORM OVER SEDGMOOR, SOMERSET, WITH THE TOWER OF MARK CHURCH

lush water-meadows of the Stour and Frome or the wide-stretching parklands of Melbury and Sherborne. Somerset is perhaps the most varied of all. Nothing could be more perfect in contrast than the shaven slopes and lustrine cliffs and caverns of the Mendips and the rugged contours of the Brendon Hills and Exmoor. From the south of the county the frowning heights of Blackdown look straight across Taunton Dene to the mild and smiling Quantocks and the little hills of Polden which lie to the south of Glastonbury and the marshes of Brue. These marshes, now reclaimed and fertile, tell their own story of the days when Athelney and Glastonbury Tor were still islands and when ships sailed right up the Parret. They have a singular dark beauty of their own which, like the beauty of the Fens, is largely one of cloud and sky. But the black soil and crimson osier withes give them a sinister colour—bringing back memories of Monmouth and the unfortunate western gentlemen who followed him—as though the blood of armies still stained the earth. Which of the many beauties of Somerset shall we prefer? The magnificence of Cheddar Gorge is almost unmatched. The mild delights of Nether Stowey and the Quantocks filled with peace the soul of a Coleridge and of a Wordsworth. There are a thousand points of vantage on the Somerset and Dorset hills from which one can watch the fickle moods of sky and earth and the constant changes of form and colour. The variety of the Somerset landscape is due, as it is elsewhere, to the geological variety of its composition. The Old Red Sandstone of northern Exmoor, with its rolling expanse of heath and bracken, bears an entirely different vegetation from the upper Greensand of the Blackdown Hills on which the rhododendrons flourish.

in such profusion. And so in other parts of the two more eastern counties of the West—here the willow gives its characteristic melancholy to the landscape, there the hedgerow elm lends it the semblance of immemorial antiquity, and here, again, its richness is subdued by the paler greens of the upland ash.

On a summer evening one may stand on the ramparts of the old hill town of Shaftesbury and look far across the shades of Blackmore Vale to the confines of Somerset. Past Melbury the line of Bulbarrow and the Dorset heights sweeps down in silhouette against the southern sky to enclose the wooded orchards and pastures about the Ivel and the Yeo. To the north the woods of Fonthill and Knoyle just mark the Wiltshire Downs and carry the eye to Pendelwood, where on the bluff that overlooks the northern gate to the west stands King Alfred's Tower. Shaftesbury was the Shaston of *Tess* and of *Jude the Obscure*, and in Hardy's pages it lives again as it was three-quarters of a century ago. In spite of superficial alterations it is not changed at heart since those days, nor are the people of Dorset. Their attachment to the soil, their sturdy independence still remain, in spite of social and agricultural changes. And the same mixture of tragedy and comedy will be found among them as there was in the time of Hardy's youth.

A vast number of us, outside the select company of Dorset men themselves, would probably say that if Dorset was not Hardy, at any rate it was Hardy to them. But if Hardy's genius has translated the essential Dorset into the terms of his art and has made this corner of England completely universal, what material in land and folk he had to deal with!

One of the most delightful ways of getting to know

Dorset and the Dorset folk is to set out on foot from Cranborne, as the present writer first did many years ago, to walk first through the Chase by Tollard Royal to the old Blandford road (far better for walking than the 'new' one in the vale below it), and so across the Stour to Hardy's Shottsford Forum. Then make your way—we are not supposing this to be done in one day—up past Bryanston to the top of Bulbarrow, and so by the old ridgeway along the tops of the Dorset heights, past Cerne Abbas and its giant, over Toller Down, till you come to Pillesdon and Lewesdon and look over Marshwood Vale and Golden Cap at the Channel. You will have seen—either one side or the other—the greater part, indeed probably the whole, of Dorset, and if you can spend long enough on the road and are not attacked by the craze for speed, if you dive occasionally for a day or so to the north or south, you will be able to pass with fair success an examination on the topography of all the finest of the Wessex novels. You will not miss the historic streets of Casterbridge and having made the shore at Lyme Regis can return eastwards along the coast, through Port Bredy and over Puncknowle till you come to the Isle and Weymouth Bay. Over the downs on which King Jarge and his princesses reviewed his troops in days depicted in *The Trumpet Major*, you will wander by Arish Mell, till you come to the noble ruins of Corfe and the Isle of Purbeck.

What Hardy has done for Dorset others have done for Devon and Cornwall. Who can travel over, or even think of, Exmoor without thronging memories of Jan Ridd and Lorna Doone? And still more, perhaps, has Kingsley done for that Devon which once controlled the destinies of England.

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

An' if the earth can show the like again,  
Yet will she fail in her seafaring men;  
Time never can produce men to o'ertake  
The fame of Grenville, Davies, Gilbert, Drake,  
Or worthy Hawkins, or of thousands more,  
That by their power made the Devonian shore  
Mock the proud Tagus.

Few of us will ever forget our first sight of

'The little white town of Bideford, which slopes upwards from its broad tide-river paved with yellow sands, and many arched old bridges where salmon wait for Autumn floods, toward the pleasant upland on the west. Above the town the hills close in, cushioned with deep oak woods, through which juts here and there a crag of fern-fringed slate; below, they lower and open more and more in softly-rounded knolls, and fertile squares of red and green, till they sink into the wide expanse of hazy flats, rich salt-marshes and rolling sandhills, where the Torridge joins her sister Taw, and both together flow quietly toward the broad surges of the bar, and the everlasting thunder of the long Atlantic swell.'

There, for us, Mrs. Leigh still walks slowly up and down the terrace, 'looking out over the winding river and the hazy sandhills and the wide western sea as she has done every evening, be it fair weather or foul, for these weary years'; and often again shall we see the young Amyas Leigh gazing around him, first at the wide bay to the northward, with its southern wall of purple cliffs; then at the dim Isle of Lundy far away at sea; then at the cliffs and downs of Morte and Braunton, right in front



24 A VILLAGE ON EXMOOR: WINSFORD, SOMERSET





25 HARVESTING IN THE BADGWORTHY VALLEY, EXMOOR

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of him; then at the vast yellow sheet of rolling sandhills and green alluvial plain, dotted with red cattle, at his feet, through which the silver estuary winds onward towards the sea.

Cornish names, like those of Devon, are to be found all over the world in places not only where the adventures of seafaring have taken them, but where those who carried them brought the age-long experience of the Cornish mines. Those who have written of Cornwall have professed—not unnaturally—to write of more dramatic forms of endeavour, and in the pages of Baring Gould, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, and others of less note, we can find many good Cornish fishermen and sailormen drawn true to life. I wish there were space—or I had the ability—to write here some description of days spent on the Cornish cliffs or on the waters of the southern estuaries. But in these times it would be ludicrous to describe St. Ives, Fowey, Looe, Polperro, the Valley of the Fal, and the Helston River as if their appearance was not almost as familiar—even to those who have not yet set foot in Cornwall—as that of St. Michael's Mount itself.

The use of the West Country as a background for literature, both classical and vulgar, and of its scenery as the basis of popular advertisement, has brought its own, not always happy, reward. The west-countryman is as hospitable as any, and neither churlish nor servile to strangers. There is, however, the constant danger that when the entertainment and conveyance of visitors becomes a really considerable part of the industry of a seacoast or a countryside, the people should become demoralized and mercenary. Not the least mercenary, perhaps, in their personal dealings with their visitors;

but it is so easy when engaged in traffic of this kind to lose the respect due to one's traditions and surroundings, to begin to care little whether hideous bungalows or tin refreshment huts disfigure the landscape, whether the roads are converted into long streets of unsightly houses which effectually conceal from the traveller the beauties the countryside affords. It is easy to fall into this state of mind, and to care for none of these things so long as the stream of tourists and casual visitors does not diminish. As for the stranger, he is for the most part only too well accustomed to the repulsive accompaniments of increased mobility and expanding population. In spite of the enormous publicity it has obtained, and the vast increase in motor-bus traffic (which fills the returning native with dismay) the West Country has not yet been very badly damaged in this manner. It is true that there are a good many examples; in the south-east of Dorset, for instance, and in the neighbourhood of such successful seaside resorts as Torquay, tentacular extension on very unpleasing lines and a very disturbing scale has taken place. Quite recently, not far from Torquay, a building estate has been developed on a slope with magnificent views, but it is unfortunate that the new houses are sited so high as to cut the sky-line from wherever they can be seen. But those who have watched the efforts of the speculative builder on the Sussex coast and have seen the havoc he has wrought between, say, Worthing and Newhaven, may be thankful that nature and opportunity have not given him quite such a free hand in the West Country. The coast from Poole to Land's End and from Sennen Cove to Bridgewater Bay, is incomparable in its alternating contrasts of mildness, ruggedness, and grandeur. And here one





27 MONKLEIGH, NORTH DEVON, ABOVE ITS WOODED COMBE

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would like to remark how accessible a great deal of it is to the pedestrian. It is not true that the public has a definite right of way on all the cliff tracks of our southwestern coasts. Natives of Cornwall and Devon, it is true, have had conferred on them, by Acts of Parliament in the seventeenth century, special rights of access to the shore to watch for pilchards and to fetch sand to the farms; but these rights do not extend to the general public and are unknown elsewhere. Landowners, on the other hand, have in many cases generously allowed the public to make use of the old coastguard tracks on their estates; and in Devon, for instance, one is seldom likely to be stopped on these paths except by overgrowth or farmers' fences. And what wonderful tracks they are! Take, for example, the cliff walk from Torcross to Salcombe Haven, which takes you by a continuous way round Start Point and Prawle Point to Salcombe Harbour. You may find just as good cliff walks on the north coast; that, for choice, which leads from Mouthmill past Gallantry Bower (with its magnificent views to the north) and ends close to Clovelly Court.<sup>f</sup>

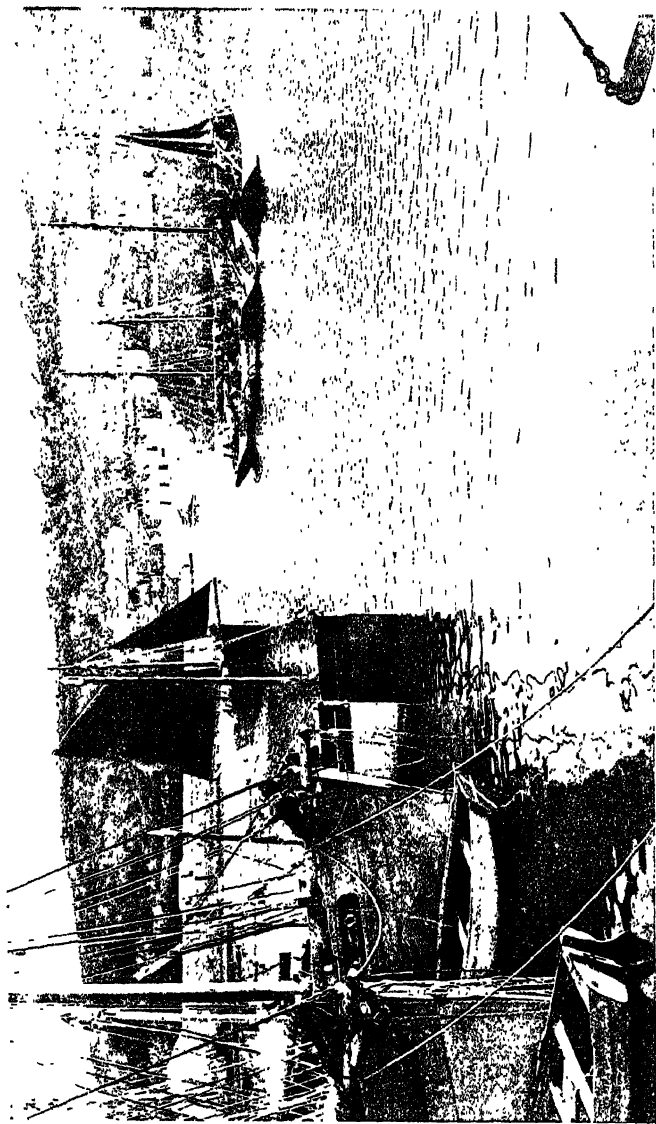
If disfigurement of the countryside is to be avoided, the combining and blending of old with new is, apart from the glaring intrusions of which we have just spoken, more a matter of colour than of shape. There is, after all, very little arrangement in the West Country landscape. Its beauty is informal, largely a matter of glimpses and vistas, or of coloured patches and chequered light and shade seen from a height—I am not speaking now of the broad effects of its coast scenery or of the great Devon moors—and away from the main thoroughfares staring incongruities and monstrosities are not so common as in many other parts of England. There are always the

hidden by-ways unknown to strangers, and viewpoints which nobody but a native discovers except by chance. Apart from this, the new must be accepted, and so far as it is humanly possible combined with the old. The circumstances of village and country-town life are changing all over the west, as elsewhere; and new social arrangements as well as agricultural and industrial changes demand corresponding changes in human surroundings. Rapid locomotion, higher standards of living, revolution in methods of farming and distribution have come to stay, and it is futile to ignore them. In earlier days similar changes, of course, took place, though, so far as building was concerned, time and the use of local materials soon combined to harmonize the present with the past. During the last half-century much has been done in the way of rebuilding and adapting in the villages and towns of the West. The result, thanks to the railways and the builders' merchants, has often been far from pleasing. Take the Devon villages, for instance, where thatch or grey slate roofs so happily combine with walls of granite or colour-washed cob. How many of them have been ruined in appearance by the praiseworthy efforts of local authorities to improve the standard of housing? Machine-made yellow bricks and red machine-made tiles are often past hope of redemption by the mellowing hand of time. In this respect Cornwall and Devon are by no means as fortunate as Somerset and Dorset, where geological diversity has brought an infinite profusion of building stone. The Mendips, the Quantocks, Ham Hill, and the hills that lie east of Bath all supplied to the medieval builder the finest stone for architectural purposes; and the result is that no county could ever have a more splendid collection of



28 STORM OVER DARTMOOR, SOUTH DEVON





29 FRENCH FISHING-BOATS IN NEWLYN HARBOUR, CORNWALL

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churches, abbeys, and houses to show than Somerset. The enthusiasm which inspired Somerset's architects, stonemasons, and sculptors no doubt owed much to Glastonbury and its traditions. It must not be forgotten that this first Christian church in Britain was never destroyed by the heathen invader, that the traditions and the legends of Glastonbury go back to the childhood of Christ Himself; that William Blake, when he asked

And did their feet in ancient time,  
Walk upon England's mountains green ?

was referring to the green Mendips over which Joseph of Arimathea, according to the legend, journeyed to the pleasantest pastures of Somerset. It was no wonder that there should grow up the richest and mightiest abbey of the west, that to-day at Wells the Cathedral, the Palace, the Deanery, the Vicar's Close, and their precincts should form a group of ecclesiastical buildings unmatched in the country as the ideal type of an English cathedral town whose low red roofs cluster about green lawns and countless pinnacles.

So far as churches are concerned, the whole of the West Country more than holds its own, though from the circumstances of their building the parish churches of the different counties differ much in the appeal they make to the eye. Granite does not lend itself readily to the later refinements of Gothic architecture, though picturesque situations will often compensate for comparative architectural tameness. Dorset has many lovely churches; but she has suffered, perhaps more than other counties of England, at the hands of the 'restorers' of the 'sixties and 'seventies of last century. The fate of much lovely roof-work, of irreplaceable carving and furniture is too

well known to need comment here. But the ecclesiastical architects, among whom Thomas Hardy learnt his craft, sometimes did even worse than could be imagined. The little parish church of Ashmore in Cranborne Chase, which, though somewhat fallen into decay, was still unaltered since Saxon times, was entirely demolished, replaced by a building of brick and flint, and the tombstones of the squire's family broken up to make a crazy pavement for the floor. In Somerset the builders of parish churches had everything to their hands in the nature of building stone. They followed the lead of those who built so faithfully the Abbey of Glastonbury; and the traditional changes in architectural style—from Norman down to Perpendicular—can all be followed in a day's journey through Somerset. The Perpendicular predominates, and many of the taller towers are a joy to see: Huish Episcopi, for instance, with its deep Norman porch, whose yellow sandstone has been burnt red by fire. The tower of Evercrech is magnificently proportioned, and everybody who cares for these things should see the churches of Wrington and Chewton Mendip.

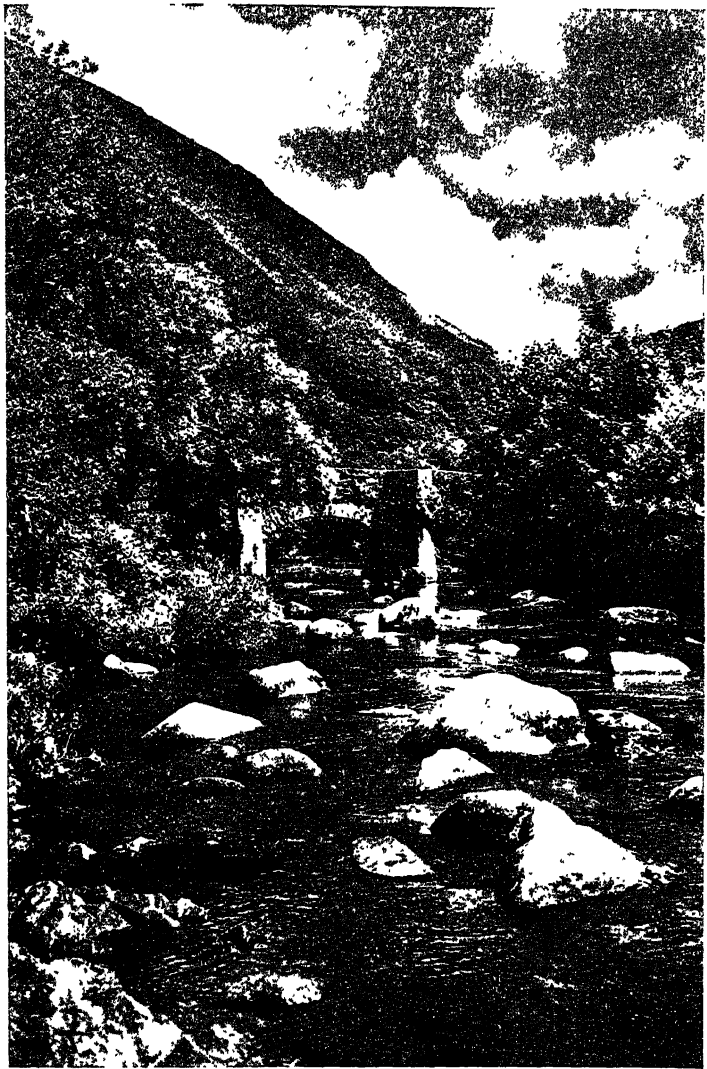
The country houses of the West Country, if we confine that term within the limits set for this chapter, are also to be found in the counties of varied and plentiful stone. When the Dissolution came to this part of the world there came a corresponding diversion of the enthusiasm for building from churches to domestic architecture—with the result, for instance, that the skill of Somersetshire's masons and builders added to her treasures in a comparatively short time some of the most interesting and beautiful of country houses. Those who were skilled in the working of Ham Hill stone gave

us, apart from that matchless jewel Montacute, both Barrington Court and the Tudor front of Brympton d'Evercy. The wealth of Somerset's houses is truly astonishing; those who have seen only a few—Cleeye Abbey, let us say, Dunster, Clevedon Court, and the Elizabethan houses round about the Cokers—know what English building is at its best. Nor is Dorset much behind. The county abounds in lovely manor-houses, such as that of Bingham's Melcombe, and one has only to think of Athelhampton, of Milton Abbey, of Kingston Lacy, of Crichel, of Cranborne, and of Bryanston and Melbury to realize the wealth and beauty of the houses wherein dwelt Thomas Hardy's group of noble dames. As for Devon, country houses are not perhaps Devon's strong point. There are many manor-houses but few palaces. This is no doubt partly due to the absence of suitable building stone, but it is also due to the fact that the county has never rejoiced in families of enormous wealth. The distinction of the Devon families from the Courtenays onwards has been undoubted, but they have lacked the riches which, coming from the Indies or elsewhere, made it possible for their contemporaries in other shires and counties to erect the noble houses and palaces they dwelt in. The same applies for the most part to Cornwall, though hidden away among the fastnesses of the Cornish hills and on the tree-clad slopes that fringe the creeks and bays of South Cornwall are a number of striking country houses with a character all their own. Built at many periods and in many different styles, they all have a curious resemblance and an individuality which seems purely Cornish. With practically no exceptions they are built of granite, and are in some ways, for this reason, not unlike the baronial houses of Scotland.

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

The house of Newton Ferrers near Callington has a wonderful outlook across the River Lynher, and owes a good deal of its fine appearance to the use which has been made of granite in its terraces. Carclew, on Devoran Creek, which flows into the Fal, looks like some cold jewel set in the blaze of enamel formed by banks of multicoloured rhododendrons. Nor should we forget Trerice, Lanhydrock, Cotehele or Place, from which the Treffrys look down over Fowey.

It will be asked why, in writing of these four counties which make up the West Country, I have mentioned so few of their well-known beauties, their historic monuments, and stated so few individual preferences. The reason of lack of space is obvious. And though a man of Devonshire stock may write, I hope, without offence of the other counties, we all love our own county best. Comparisons must be of a general nature if they are not to appear in bad taste to others. I may, however, say in conclusion that I think the sight of Plymouth and its Sound from the sea on an early summer's morning is the most wonderful thing in England, as I doubt not it almost is in the world.



30 A DARTMOOR RIVER: THE TEIGN AT FINGLE BRIDGE



31 THE ROLLING CHALK EXPANSE OF SALISBURY PLAIN, WILTSHIRE

## CHALK COUNTRY:

*THE WILTSHIRE AND BERKSHIRE  
DOWNLANDS AND THE CHILTERN*

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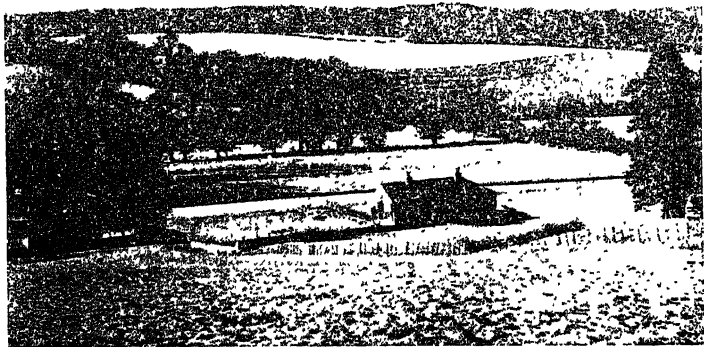
A VAGUE title enables one to please one's own fancy, and still avoid the criticisms of the meticulous. That is why I have not prefixed the definite article to this one, for opinions differ tremendously as to what is or is not 'The Chalk Country' of England. The returning wanderer will look upon the South Downs, whose white cliffs greet him in such friendly fashion as his ship comes up the Channel, as the only 'Chalk Country' which really matters. A glance at a geological map informs me that several of England's counties are very largely chalk. Fishing friends tell me tales of chalk streams inhabited by both trout and grayling as far north as Yorkshire; in my childhood I learned to throw a fly in the chalk streams of the South-west; and various travellers by car, by horse, by train, and by 'Shanks's Mare' have revealed to me that there are chalk pits almost from



one end of England to the other. There is, then, no district which most deserves the title of 'The Chalk Country', but there is, as Wiltshire has it, 'a limb ov a lot ov chalk'; so here a man, who was born on the 'chalk', who has lived all his life on the 'chalk', and who, in all probability will be buried in the 'chalk', proposes to write about several pieces of 'Chalk Country', which range from Whipsnade to Broadchalke.

In doing this we shall visit half a dozen counties—Herts, Bucks, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, and Wilts—and obtain a peep at one or two more, for all this country is the country of the Downs. The Chiltern Hills range in a south-westerly direction from Bedfordshire, through Herts and Bucks, and end in Oxfordshire, just above Pangbourne, which is over the county boundary in Berkshire. Immediately across the valley of the Thames the Berkshire Downs almost connect the Chilterns on the east with the Marlborough Downs on the west. From there these downs run southwards to Salisbury Plain and Andover, with only the Pewsey Vale to break their rolling majestic range, and then in serried ridges they wander south-west into Dorset.

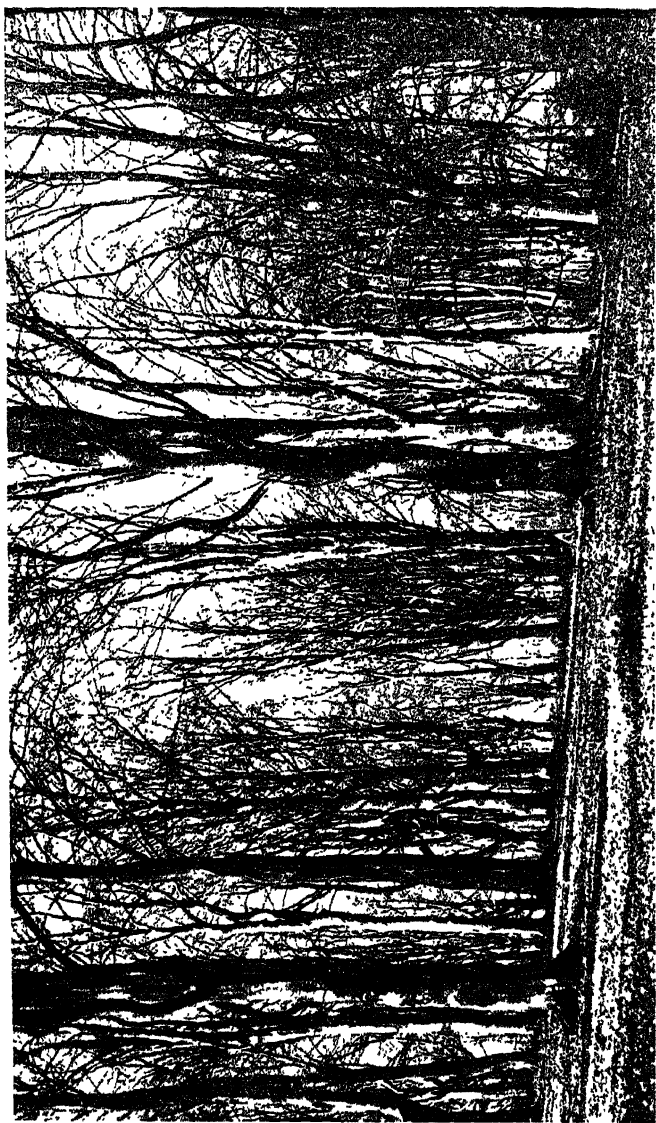
All this country is 'Chalk Country' and all of it is inland, so much so that from no point in it is it possible to see the sea even on the clearest day. Which, to my mind, is greatly in its favour, for, although the sailors of England have written most of her history, to-day the sea-coast of our country is largely seaside, and is therefore no longer the real England. Transport, increasingly cheaper and swifter transport, has turned our coasts into a fun fair, peopled by a motley throng, which even the most charitable could not call a fair sample



32 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE: THE CHESS VALLEY NEAR SARRATT



33 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE: THE CHESS VALLEY NEAR CHESHAM  
THE CHILTERN



34 A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BEECHWOOD IN WINTER

## CHALK COUNTRY

of English people. To meet the real England and the true English you must journey inland.

Ivinghoe Beacon is as good a place as any to make for in order to have a look at, or rather a look from, the chalk country of the Chiltern Hills. Leave your car—it must be a car, for we have forgotten any other mode of transport these days—at its foot, and clamber to the top. There you will find a low pedestal which has an inscription on one side and a round metal disk on its top; and there, a trifle out of breath, you will stand and appreciate the view of many miles of England which lies beneath you. You are on top of the world, and on a clear day what cannot you see? The metal disk will tell you what to look for.

Over two miles almost due east the Whipsnade Lion stands firm in white chalk on a greenish-brown hillside. Eight miles north-east lies Toddington Church, north-west six miles distant is Leighton Buzzard, and eleven miles to the south-west is Pulpit Hill near Chequers; while below you, far below, to the north-west is spread the vale of Aylesbury, with its fields and hedgerows making it look more like an immense patchwork quilt than anything else. This last is blue clay, not chalk, but it is from the heart of the chalk that you gaze upon it. Look long at this flat plain, for here is a piece of almost unspoilt England, and the only unspoilt country near you. In any other direction you will see chalk country which has been spoiled by the builder and those who employ him. You are too near London, which Cobbett justly called 'The Great Wen', and many people who are forced to work there live in modern houses which they have erected in unsightly ribbons on either side of the highways near Ivinghoe. They live in the 'Chalk

'Country', but they are not of it, and even Whipsnade, which is the latest attempt of civilization to imprison kindly, cannot be called either country or even England; it is only the Wen breaking out in a slightly less hideous eruption than usual.

But Ivinghoe Beacon and its surrounding country are now the property of the National Trust, and now this beauty-spot is free to everybody—surely that is a point in modernity's favour? Undoubtedly, but what manner of people are those who now have free access to this hill and these short-turfed downs? Read the notice on the pedestal and you will discover that only recently a conviction was obtained and someone was fined for defacing the turf around it, in a vain hope of handing down his initials to posterity for a space. Ivinghoe Beacon itself and the Chiltern Hills generally are too large and solid for such folk to destroy, but the internal combustion engine is aiding and abetting their defacement in all sorts of ways.

But here and there a little of the old country life and work can be found in this district of the Chilterns. When you have gazed your fill from Ivinghoe Beacon, journey almost due south to the High Wycombe district. There, if you drive slowly and use your eyes, you will almost be sure to see a pole sticking out of a wooden hut near some cottage; and when you see this you will know that you have found a chair-leg turner's workshop, for that pole is part of the rather crude form of lathe which he still uses to-day. This village industry still thrives, and thousands of chair legs and stretchers are made from beech-wood every year by cottage craftsmen; but it will not be long before machines of steel knives and cog-wheels replace the wooden lathes of this Chiltern industry, and yet another race of country craftsmen will die out.

## CHALK COUNTRY

High Wycombe streets are now a medley of motor-cars and traffic lights; Marlow and Henley are or will soon become glorified road-houses or night-clubs, although no one will be able to destroy all the beauty of the Thames at Marlow Bridge, at Henley, or at Pangbourne; but none of these are 'Chalk Country' proper. Let us cross the river, climb the Berkshire Downs, and journey by side roads almost due west to Lambourn and thence to Aldbourne. All the time we shall be in rural unspoilt 'Chalk Country', a land of rolling downs, little villages, lonely farm buildings, a sheep and corn country of light chalk land. Here we shall be far enough away from big towns to see no sign of their festering influence, save that here, as in most truly rural districts of England's countryside, signs of prosperity are absent owing to the popular policy of sacrificing the countryside to the towns.

There are no big towns in all this wide stretch of spacious country, and consequently scarcely any raw red-brick houses and no crowds. Of course not, because only town or seaside allures the crowd. Whether you travel through this district by car or on foot, you will be forced to realize how small and insignificant you are by comparison with the spacious permanence of this downland country. It is a land of fresh air, bright sunshine, and magnificent clouds. In summer it is shrouded in a hazy blue, but even on the hottest day there is a breeze; and, if you lie on your back looking dreamily at the sky, this breeze will make a rustle in the bennets around you so that you will imagine you are lying by the sea.

Even when frost holds the land in its iron grip there is still a slight breeze, but so slight that all is hushed

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

and motionless around you, save for a hawk which hovers and side-slips and hovers again against a grey sky as he searches for his prey. Under such conditions you must banish all thoughts of lazing and dreaming in these uplands, and stride manfully across the downs to keep warm. But it is in the spring when a walk in this country is most pleasant. In March, say, that month of wind and cloud, which with its fine bluster ushers in more balmy April, that is the best time to visit this district of the 'Chalk Country'. The air is like wine; the lark, having mastered the art of hovering almost stationary in a gale, sings cheerily on high; and hares dance minuets all around you. Even the clouds are in like mood. Clouds, squadrons of clouds, whole brigades of clouds, race madly across the blue sky in obedience to the orders of the March winds. Their shadows gallop up the hillside to meet you, overtake you, or cross your path, and then go shouting madly down into the valley and up the far hillside, hurrying ever hurrying. The whole earth and its dwellers seem to be playing in gay abandon, as though it were their last youthful fling before the serious summer work of production comes along in due season.

In this country one finds the English village proper, a small cluster of buildings set snugly under a hill, which has been erected for one purpose only, to house the small community necessary to serve the land around it, for this tract of downland country boasts but one industry—farming. In most of the villages signs of the decay of farming can be seen—a gaping roof of a thatched barn, the absence of paint, and the general appearance of depression. Indeed, if you travel about three miles west of Aldbourne you will find a most glaring example

of the effect of bad times on the countryside, the deserted village of Snap. On my first visit to this place I asked the way from a farm workman, and here is his reply. 'Snap! You do mane the wild land, I 'low? 'Tis along thic lane 'bout a mile. You wun't vind much o' the village left, an' nobody don't live there nowadays.'

I obeyed his directions and subsequently discovered that Snap was in reality a deserted village. There were the remains of several cottages and the skeletons of two large farm-houses, one almost a manor-house. Here and there I found apple trees, the remains of what had once been gardens, and a disused well or two. Sheep were wandering through the ground floor rooms of the farm-houses, and over the whole place hung the hush of desertion. It was, indeed, the abomination of desolation. Yet, to quote from Sir W. Beach Thomas's book *How England becomes Prairie*—with reference to Snap, 'as many as forty-four children attended the school!'—And now, school, houses, cottages, parents, and children are no more to be found there. There has been no war in England save the cruel war of economics between country and town, yet Snap is like unto those French villages on the Somme which suffered the effect of modern artillery fire. A mile or two below Snap, close to the village of Ogbourne on the main road between Marlborough and Swindon, Wiltshire's one large town, yet another result of this struggle can be seen, for there is a piece of country which flourishes gaily while Snap and other villages decay. What type of farming enables this land to flourish? None at all. It is merely a golf course.

Now let us visit another patch of 'Chalk Country' which I usually term the 'lost country' for two reasons. Firstly, because it is too wild a country for modern



civilization to visit; and secondly, because no matter from which direction I approach it I always get lost in it. It is oblong in shape, about twelve miles long by eight miles wide, and it is easily found on the map because it contains no railway, no main road, and no large villages. Its four corners are Hungerford, Newbury, Andover, and Ludgershall, and, once you leave either of the main roads which bound it, you will find yourself in a country of narrow, winding lanes, steep hills, small valleys, high downs, minute villages, and rabbits innumerable.

My first introduction to this district was through the medium of my encyclopaedia, in which I chanced to read that Inkpen Beacon was the highest chalk hill in England. This being news to me I decided to visit it at the first opportunity, and one January morning I set out to find it. My map informed me that Inkpen Beacon was almost in the middle of this patch of 'lost country', so I drove first to Andover, and then along the Newbury road to Hurstbourne Tarrant. There I turned left-handed, and journeyed via Ibthorpe and Vernham's Street—anything less like a street than this village I have yet to find—to Linkenholt. From there the road ran downhill very sharply for a while, and then took me, climbing steadily, towards the village of Combe.

All these villages are small, very small, for the countryside around them is too poor to support many human beings, its major industry being shooting I should imagine; but, wherever there was a patch of land level enough and fertile enough to pay for farming, that land was farmed. Approaching Combe, I crossed a flattish tract of country of between one and two hundred acres. This land is ringed with high downs—Oat Hill, where

it would take a much braver man than I am to plant anything at all, much less oats; Walbury Hill, or rather Walbury Camp; and Sheepless Hill, whose very name describes its poverty. From Combe my road ran almost due north up a long, steep hill, and then suddenly I found myself on the very edge of downland, feeling that to drive a few yards farther north would result in my car tumbling miles below into the Kennet Vale.

To all intents and purposes I was already on Inkpen Beacon, but here I left the hard road, and turned westward along a grassy track to its highest point. And there I found a gibbet-post where some hundred of years ago the villagers of Combe hung a man and a woman, side by side, from the crosspiece which is about twenty feet from the ground. The post is now a trifle out of perpendicular, but it is still firm, firm enough to carry a similar burden to-day. Well, if Fate so wills it that I am to be hanged I can imagine no finer setting for my exit from this world than Inkpen Beacon. But even so I should try my utmost for my final glance to be towards the south, for then I should have but few regrets. Why? Because south of that gibbet-post lies a country of poverty and desolation, a country of juniper bushes and rabbits, a land of steep, barren slopes on which the chalk shows through the thin turf continuously, a country in which very few acres are worthy of man's effort. Such were my thoughts as I stood by that gibbet on a cold January morning.

But looking northwards the contrast was very sharp. Below me, miles below me, lay the Kennet Vale, by comparison a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of rich farms, prosperous villages, snug churches, and kindly meadows: a land inhabited by mankind. Yet

here, although the patchwork picture was very like that to be seen from Ivinghoe Beacon, man had not spoilt the countryside as a result of his dominion, for there is no large town near by. Consequently, although this country is highly farmed, much of the beauty of the landscape is directly due to the varied pattern with which farming clothes it year by year. From this high shelf of down everything in the lovely countryside far below appeared as in miniature—toy houses, toy churches, toy fields, a detailed picture of toy farming, a bird's-eye view of a bit of the real England.

Again I turned round to gaze southwards once more at that rugged countryside through which I had just travelled. All the villages in it, even Combe, were hidden from sight, and no sign of man or of his doings could I see. Could this be England, the England of roads, and cars, and houses, and factories, and teeming hordes of people? No! Instead of being hanged I must have been transported to a strange country. I was alone in the world, with a gibbet at my back, and desolation in front of me for miles. And then, a full mile below me, I saw a curl of smoke ascending through the trees—blue smoke, the blue smoke of a wood fire. I wished the hardy Robinson Crusoe who tended it a prosperous New Year, and turned again towards a more thickly populated countryside.

It was a winter day, a day of wind-hurried clouds, with here and there a gleam of sunshine. Five or six miles away on the northern slope of the Kennet Valley these gleams appeared to move here and there like a spotlight over the patchwork quilt of the countryside. A dull brown square bordered with black hedgerows would flame in brown amber for a moment. Then



35 THE VIEW FROM RIVAR HILL IN THE NORTH HAMPSHIRE DOWNS



36 THE WILTSHIRE DOWNS AT BRIXTON DEVERILL



37 THE BERKSHIRE DOWNS NEAR BISHOPSTONE

## CHALK COUNTRY

perhaps three miles east or west of this the sun would pick out the tower of a church in silver, or the gable end of a brick building in military scarlet. This searchlight effect of the sun was so charming on that January morning that I decided to risk getting stuck, and drove slowly westwards along the grass track, with the sun playing peep-bo with the clouds over the valley on my right. After two miles of this I found the metalled surface of the road from Ham to Oxenwood under my tyres, and then turned very sharply to the left, back along the ridge once more on the road to Buttermere. Why this small village bears such a name I do not know, for it is situated almost on the top of the Inkpen ridge, which is definitely not the general idea of a dairy country.

Buttermere seemed deserted. I met no one, and the only sign of life in the village was the washing waving in the breeze in the cottage gardens, for it was a Monday morning. But half-way down a steep slope I spied a small church. The road to it was almost greened over, so I left the car on the top of the hill and walked down to the churchyard gate. There was a farm-house within 200 yards and perhaps six cottages within a half mile, but no other source of congregation. Still, some new tombstones told me that burial had taken place within a year or two, but the whole place looked so deserted that I walked down the green path to the church door, wondering if the building were still used for worship. And there, on the notice-board I read a printed notice, which was headed, 'Licence rates for mechanically propelled road vehicles for the year ending, December 31, 1935'. And I had been imagining that I had arrived at the back of beyond!

Evidently it was time that I returned to more concrete

things, of which lunch seemed to be the most essential; but, although the inhabitants of those parts still kept up their religion, apparently they did not drink anything alcoholic. Buttermere boasted no inn at all, so I drove some two miles away down to Fosbury, where again I drew blank. Another mile brought me to Oxenwood, which had a telephone exchange, but whose only pub possessed but an off-licence. It was cold and I wanted to 'consume some beer *on* the premises', so I set off for Tidcombe. This village was teetotal also, and not until I reached the 'Nag's Head' just outside the village of Marten did I find what I sought.

I hope no one will think that I set too great store by inns and their fare, for in truth I try only to value them at their proper worth in the general scheme, but I do advise anyone who decides to explore this lost-off countryside to realize that it does not cater for the casual visitor in any way. The land there is too poor to support many people, and the lanes are so twisty and in many places so steep that the tourist knows them not. A friend of mine, whose work forced him to journey daily by car from the village of Ham down in the Kennet Vale to Highclere, as the crow flies about eight miles, found that although the direct route across this 'lost country' was many miles shorter on his speedometer, he could drive the longer way round three sides of a square via Hungerford and Newbury, somewhere about fourteen miles, in thirty minutes less time. Therefore, I think that this district of the 'Chalk Country' will remain undisturbed for many years to come. A tract of land which contains no rivers, no roads, no railways, scarcely any soil worth farming, and no mineral save chalk, possesses few attractions for the human race; and

## CHALK COUNTRY

here, where Hampshire, Berkshire, and Wiltshire meet, are about seventy square miles of country which answer to that description. It seems almost incredible that such a large expanse of lonely countryside should still remain in thickly populated Southern England to-day, and consequently this wild chalk country around Inkpen Beacon, in spite of its bad roads and its desolation, has a charm all its own.

All the 'Chalk Country' which we have visited up to date has possessed many drawbacks. Ivinghoe and its surroundings, owing to their proximity to London, have lost much of their former charm; the Aldbourne district and the Berkshire Down country show the harmful effect of the agricultural depression in a very marked degree; while the Inkpen Beacon countryside by its general formation never was and never can be anything but a poor and desolate land. Is there then no 'Chalk Country' which is still unspoilt by modernity, and yet still shows signs of comfortable prosperity for its inhabitants? Yes, where the rivers run southwards from Salisbury Plain you will find what is, to my mind, the best of the 'Chalk Country'.

W. H. Hudson in his book *A Shepherd's Life* likens this district to a human left hand with five rivers representing the thumb and four fingers meeting in the middle of the palm at Salisbury. Beginning with the thumb they are the Ebbles, the Nadder, the Wylye, the Avon, and the Bourne, and their five valleys and dividing down ridges comprise—to use the title of Mr. James Turle's charming book, although he did not refer to this district in its pages—*The England I Love Best*. Even Salisbury Plain itself is not half so desolate a country as many people imagine, for where it has not been disturbed by



military occupation it is broken up into hill and dale in most attractive fashion. The hills, too, are not bleak downs, but are dotted here and there with beech copses, while in the dales, the winter bournes, or winter flowing brooks, show their courses even in the driest summer in green streaks of fertile country.

But on its southern side Salisbury Plain breaks up into five valleys, each with a river proper, not merely a winter bourne, and here indeed is a smiling land. On either side of the river smooth high downs run southwards, tilting their rainfall down into the water-meadows below. The valleys are rarely more than two miles wide, but how snug and prosperous they look! All through them there is tall timber, beech, ash, and elm, and so numerous are these trees by the roadsides that often the villages are almost hidden from sight; while down in the meadows near the river are tall poplars, white-leaved abeles, willows innumerable, and underneath them all a carpet of lush green grass. Not even the ceaseless flow of motor-traffic which races along the main roads in these valleys can rob the chalk stream water-meadows of their serene beauty; they are indeed the home of abiding peace. And under meadows, plough, and down, is chalk, solid chalk.

Other rivers and valleys in England are beautiful, I know, but here the valleys are so narrow, and so shut in by friendly downs that their beauty seems to be concentrated in a small enough compass for the mind and eye to appreciate in comfort. Here too the villages are prosperous, for in this district farming has been able to put up a worthy fight against bad times. Most of the farms run from the river to the top of the down ridges, which means that each has a proportion of both rich and

## CHALK COUNTRY

poor land. The water-meadows themselves are a rich alluvial deposit, and from them as one walks up the hill-side the soil gets slightly poorer and slightly thinner with each step until on the top of the downs there is only a thin coating beneath the close green turf and solid chalk. Years ago this district was a sheep and corn country, but now dairying, poultry, and pigs are the main business of its farming, corn being produced only in such proportions to work in with the production of more perishable produce; while the Hampshire Down arable flocks have been largely superseded by grass sheep. But while the farming has changed to meet the times the beauty of the countryside remains unaltered.

All these valleys are very similar both in their appearance and in the character of their farming, but there is one valley in particular which is my favourite. This is treason, I suppose, for I still farm in the Wylde Valley where I was born and bred; but, even so, it is the Chalke Valley, or valley of the River Ebble, which is my Naboth's Vineyard. One reason is because it differs from the others in that no main road runs through it, and there is no likelihood that it will ever lose this undoubted advantage. Another is that this valley is narrower than its neighbours, and that the downs on either side of it are higher. Consequently it is sheltered and warm. What a smiling valley it is! At every season of the year, even in January, the grass is greener in the Chalke Valley than anywhere else around Salisbury. Why there should be a letter 'e' added to the word 'Chalk' when it is used to describe the valley of the River Ebble I do not know, or why the same addition is made in the names of two villages in it, Bowerchalke and Broadchalke. I hate to think that it is due to that form of snobbery which induces some folk to

do the same to good old English surnames, which, in their possessors' eyes, have a plebian look in their ordinary form. Anyway, somehow or other this 'e' has crept in to the Chalke Valley, which is, thanks be, far too lovely for such a little thing to spoil its charm.

Many people tell me that this valley is off the map, but discerning folk will realize this to be an added attraction, not a drawback. The River Ebble wanders in leisurely fashion past unspoilt villages, Alvediston, Ebbesbourne Wake, Fifield Bavant, Broadchalke, Bishopstone, to Coombe Bissett, where the main Salisbury-Dorchester road marks the end of the Chalke Valley and also the end of quiet comfort. Some day, if fortune favours me, I hope to live in this valley, for here is the best bit of 'Chalk Country' that I know.

No doubt other folk will have other views as to which bit of 'Chalk Country' is the loveliest, and the countryside from which to make one's pick is wide indeed; but all districts of the 'Chalk' have one feature in common. 'Chalk Country' is a country of background. No matter where you wander in it you will be on the downs or on the edge of them. Always they will loom in front of you like a green canvas, hedge you in like ramparts on either side, or form a solid background to your rear. Consequently, 'Chalk Country' provides the happy mean between mountainous country and flat country. Flat plains are usually more fertile, and mountains are usually more majestic; but the former is often dull and uninteresting, while the latter frowns rather than welcomes. The downs give one light and shade, and hill and dale, and peace and quiet, and always a friendly welcome. Rightly or wrongly, the 'Chalk Country' of their rolling rounded ridges is the England I love best.

Clive Rouse

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THE  
SOUTH COUNTRY:  
*WEALD, RIDGE AND DOWN*

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THE South-east corner of England, comprising the counties of Kent, Sussex, and Surrey, to which Hampshire may be conveniently added, provides a greater variety of landscape and scenery than is to be found in any other part of the country. On a journey to London from any of the four chief ports in these counties at which one might land—Southampton, Newhaven, Folkestone, or Dover—one receives an impression of lines of rolling chalk downs, fertile alluvial plains, great stretches of heath, areas of pine and woodland, Greensand hills with their rich vegetation, little streams in wooded valleys, and agricultural land of all sorts—plough, pasture, and orchard. There is nothing spectacular. There is not the grandeur of mountains, the sweep of great rivers, or the rugged coastline that one has elsewhere; but in its place there is a quiet beauty:

something that is at once varied and homely, almost intimate, happy, and peculiarly English.

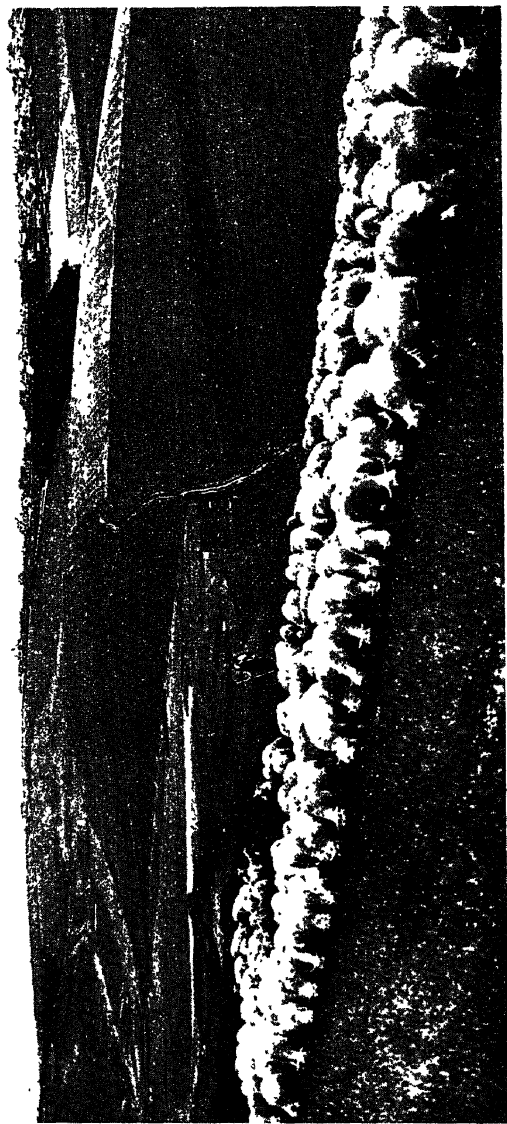
The reason for this great diversity of scene is that many different geological formations occur in the area in question. These all have their effect on vegetation, agriculture, industries, and building styles and materials. For not the least of the beauties of South-east England are to be found in the old buildings, the villages, churches, and great houses with which these counties are so richly endowed.

To treat such a varied tract as one unit is not an easy task. But actually all four counties have at least two features in common, which are in fact their predominant characteristics. Firstly, the wonderful extent of woodland, much of it a relic of the great British forest of Anderida, formerly covering a great part of the Weald from Kent, through North Sussex, Surrey, and into Hampshire; and secondly, the remarkable chalk formations known as the Downs. This latter formation predominates, and from its centre in Hampshire runs eastward, branching into two lines, the North and South Downs, through Surrey, Kent, and Sussex, thus making a link through all four counties which it is easy to follow.

The chalk downs of Hampshire are massed mainly in the centre of the county with a north-westerly trend, passing thence into Berkshire and Wiltshire. In the north-west corner are many fine prospects in a country that is not as well known as it deserves to be. Kingsclere, Highclere, and Burghclere, with Beacon Hill, Sidown Hill, and Ladle Hill may be mentioned. Farther south, the downs, with their rounded contours often crowned by clumps of trees, extend about Winchester, and once more reach a considerable height in the stately sweep



38 THE RIDGE OF THE NORTH DOWNS AT COLLEY HILL, SURREY



39 ON THE SOUTH DOWNS NEAR ROTTINGDEAN, SUSSEX

## THE SOUTH COUNTRY

of Butser Hill (900 feet), which is a little north of Broad-halfpenny Down, Hambledon, whose springy turf has delighted cricketers for almost 200 years, and where the first rules of the game were established by the Hambledon Club in 1774. South again of the Forest of Bere, is a further chalk elevation at Portsdown Hill; and the formation is repeated (with many others) in the Isle of Wight, terminating in the sea at the Needles, where great detached pinnacles of chalk stand out of the water in a line, making one of the most picturesque of promontories, terminating in its black and white lighthouse.

The long lines of the North and South Downs branch eastward from the main Hampshire group; the North Downs, commencing about Farnham on the Surrey border, continue their broad curve in the Hog's Back to Guildford, where they are cut by the River Wey. Then comes a lovely stretch with villages clustering at the downs' foot on the south side, including Albury, Shere, and Wotton, the last named having been the home of John Evelyn the diarist and contemporary of Pepys. Near Dorking, Box Hill raises its splendid bulk, dotted with the box trees that give it its name, and with yew, above the little River Mole flowing down the beautiful Mickleham Valley. The stream continues its way past Leatherhead to Stoke D'Abernon where in the secluded little church is the splendid brass of Sir John D'Abernon (1277), the earliest in England. In this stretch of downs also, above Albury, is Newlands Corner, which for all its popularity is none the less a very wonderful viewpoint. And so the scarp continues, past Reigate, into Kent at Westerham, finally reaching the sea at Shakespeare's Cliff, Dover, the line only being broken in three places—by the Darent, the Medway, and the Stour.



The South Downs, passing into Sussex from Hampshire near Petersfield, follow a roughly parallel course. In the west they are gloriously wooded until the Arun Valley cuts through them at Arundel. At this place, rising from dense woods, the great castle of the Fitzalans and Howards stands guard over the steep market place and river crossing. Arundel Park extends amongst the downs themselves, and is justly famed for its beauty. From Arundel eastwards, apart from great isolated clumps of trees, the range is bare and impressive, the steep scarp facing north towards the Weald, the plateau extending in rolling chalk hills and valleys towards the sea, and sheltering such picturesque villages as Ovingdean, Telscombe, Falmer, and West Dean. Before reaching the sea at Beachy Head, that splendid cliff towering 400 feet above the lighthouse dwarfed at its base, the range is cut several times by rivers—the Adur, on the banks of which Lancing College Chapel stands out prominently, facing Shoreham across the estuary; the Ouse at Lewes, flowing to the sea at Newhaven, and joined by the little Glyndebourne; and finally the Cuckmere, in whose valley, under the protecting downs, nestle such charming places as Alfriston, and Litlington. Indeed, the whole length of the South Downs is such a succession of scenery and places, all clamouring to be described, that one's account is in danger of becoming a catalogue. So that Ditchling, Poynings, and all that splendid stretch of country must be taken for granted.

To stay, at least once, in one of these remote Downland villages is an experience that everyone should try to have: for it will become increasingly difficult to sample the genuinely primitive before long. I remember staying in Alfriston not so very many years ago. In the long



40 ARUNDEL, SUSSEX, BENEATH THE WOODED SOUTH DOWNS



41 CORN HARVEST IN SUSSEX

## THE SOUTH COUNTRY

spring evenings one could go out on the downs after supper. As one climbed up and up, the whole of the Cuckmere Valley opened to view, the stream a winding silver thread, with the sea in the distance, while at one's feet the village itself clustered. On the far side of the valley, growing mistier in the evening haze, was Wilmington Hill; all below was spread the Weald, the tower of a church here and there peeping out from its surrounding cluster of trees, the cotton-wool smoke from a distant train floating in gradually diminishing puffs. Before one, the line of the downs stretched on to Firle Beacon, with its steep face northward, and a tumble of hills and combes lost in shadow to seaward. I shall always remember the peace and stillness of it all, and the sweet scent of the short turf.

Then there is a group of charming hamlets in the Ouse Valley. Lewes with its steep streets crowned by the castle, and its ruins of the once great Cluniac Priory of St. Pancras in the valley below (long since cut in half by the railway), stands at the point where the river cuts through the line of the downs, which are here broken up into a splendid confusion of rounded hills. Down the valley towards Newhaven lie, amongst several other hamlets, Rodmell, Southease, and Tarring Neville. Rodmell is quite a pretentious place—besides its church and cottages it has an inn and a shop: the real, genuine village shop at which you may purchase a collar-stud, a pound of sausages, a bottle of scent, or a pennyworth of bull's-eyes. Southease must be unique in one respect at least—it has not even an inn. The rectory, a house, and a few cottages fringe the little Green, at one side of which is the church with its round tower and its wall paintings; and below are 'The Brooks', the marshy land

near the canalized Ouse, where are fine cattle pastures. Tarring Neville is as small, and it again has its medieval church. In such places life is very simple. And there are still many of them up and down the country, typical of rural England, where the same sort of life has continued gently through centuries.

Between the steep escarpments of the North and South Downs lies the area known as the Weald, extending into Kent, Surrey, and Sussex. This, composed of intricate geological formations, is not the flat clay plain that many people imagine. On the contrary, it contains ground actually higher than the downs themselves; and Leith Hill, rising to nearly 1,000 feet is the highest point in South-eastern England. A line of Lower Greensand hills begins near Petersfield and follows, roughly, a line parallel to the scarp of the North Downs throughout their length, reaching the sea near Folkestone. Such places as the neighbourhood of Haslemere, Hindhead, Blackdown, Leith Hill, and Hurtwood, whose wild beauty of heath, dark pine, hill, and woodland is well known, belong to this section. Samuel Pepys traversed some part of it on August 6 and 7, 1668, and had an unpleasant experience of its wildness when on his way to Portsmouth. ‘ . . . So over the water to Fox Hall; and there my wife and Deb. took me up’ (in the coach) ‘and we away to Gilford, losing our way for three or four miles about Cobham. At Gilford we dined; and I showed them the hospital there of Bishop Abbot’s, and his tomb in the church. . . .’ (all of which one may see in Guildford, with its steep High Street, to-day). ‘So to coach again, and got to Liphook, late over Hindhead, having an old man, a guide, in the coach with us; but got thither with great fear of being out of our way,

## THE SOUTH COUNTRY

it being ten at night.' The wild stretch around Hindhead is almost unimpaired to-day, but it is fortunately no longer necessary to trust to the services of elderly guides for one's route, and Thursby and Waggoner's Wells may be visited without difficulty.

Finally, there is the Forest Ridge, a country of upland plateaux and fine wooded stretches, extending eastward from Horsham into Kent, and including St. Leonard's, Worth, and Ashdown Forests. A southern branch, the Battle Ridge, touches the sea at Fairlight, east of Hastings, where there are some picturesque glens and cliffs. At Worth itself, though the forest is somewhat denuded, there is one of the most notable Saxon churches in all Sussex, which one should on no account miss seeing. As the place-names of this area show, great tracts were formerly wood or forest land—Fernhurst, Ticehurst, Hawkhurst, Wadhurst, and many others.

Two other areas, having particular characteristics, must be mentioned to conclude this general survey—the New Forest in South-west Hampshire, where again the termination *-hurst* occurs in corroboration of its nature; and Romney Marsh, that curious flat area lying between Winchelsea, Appledore, and Hythe, largely in Kent. Both these I shall try to describe later.

The north of Surrey, in the Thames basin, requires no special mention. A great deal of it is suburbanized, and even the North Downs, in parts, are so near London that whole districts are overrun with week-enders and their cars. Though the first true country out of town has some attraction, it is rather sophisticated. The western borders are made up of the Bagshot Heath type of country which, being open and rather uninteresting, is admirably suited to the great military camps that overrun it. North Kent

likewise is within the influence of ever-growing London—though Eynsford, with its picturesque bridge over the Darent, is a notable survival perilously near Bromley.

Setting aside such industrial places as Chatham, with its Naval Dockyard, and Rochester (though not forgetting the latter's massive Norman keep and cathedral overlooking the Medway), there is a great attraction to be found in the flat country about the Isle of Sheppey and the Thames and Medway estuary. The fleet of Whitstable oyster dredgers under sail or the numerous groups of small fishing vessels fire the imagination and move one more to think of the antiquity of their calling than do the liners, cargo vessels, and tankers that one sees in deeper water beyond them. Then there are the Thames barges with their red-brown sails to add another picturesque and characteristic touch to this part of Kent, making their placid way up and down the river and round the coast.

The sea, in fact, has always meant much to this corner of England, owing to the proximity of its ports to the Continent; and this factor has played a dominant part in the development and history not only of South-east England, but of the country as a whole. Every schoolboy knows that Julius Caesar landed at Pegwell Bay close by what was then actually the *Island* of Thanet. But not everyone realizes that from the Roman civilization of the next 400 years there are more numerous and more impressive remains in South-east England than almost anywhere else in the country. The line of the Watling Street, and the Stane Street, great Roman roads connecting Dover, Canterbury, and Rochester with London, and Chichester with London, remains practically the same. Winchester and Portsmouth were likewise linked with London, and at Silchester, in North



42 NEWINGTON CHURCH, AMONG BLOSSOMING KENTISH ORCHARDS





43 ROMNEY MARSH AND OLD ROMNEY CHURCH



44 WINTER IN SURREY AT ABINGER HAMMER

## THE SOUTH COUNTRY

Hampshire, no fewer than five principal roads met—a sort of Roman Clapham Junction. But Silchester has vanished; and to-day the site of its forum, temples, houses, shops, and baths is covered by pleasant fields and hedgerows in the quiet agricultural country of North Hampshire. Only a few stretches of walling and the earth ramparts of the amphitheatre remain to testify to its existence and greatness.

The case is very different at Porchester, however. Here, in later Roman times, was built the most westerly of a series of great fortresses under the command of an official known as the Count of the Saxon Shore, to defend the coast and ports against the inroads of the Saxons. The stronghold stands at the head of Portsmouth Harbour—the *Portus Magnus* of the Romans—its walls touching the water on one side. The whole of the Roman walling, with its intermediate towers, still stands. In the twelfth and succeeding centuries, a medieval castle was built in one corner of the great Roman enclosure, and a church also occupies a sheltered position within the early walls. It is a moving experience to stand on the top of the Norman keep and look down and round upon the scene. In the background is the chalk buttress of Portsdown Hill, much the same in outline, probably, as when the Romans came to build the walls and towers of the fortress immediately below. But instead of the fleet of galleys they protected sixteen hundred years ago, one looks across Portsmouth Harbour at the flat bulk of an aircraft carrier and the masts and superstructure of the latest warships rising grey in front of the distant outline of the Isle of Wight.

Impressive remains of others in this series of Saxon Shore forts are to be seen at several places eastward

along the coast. At Pevensey, where there is a lot to be seen in other ways, the Roman walls stand to a considerable height; the situation was similar to that of Porchester, at the head of a harbour. But you may search in vain for that harbour to-day, because the whole of Pevensey Bay has silted up, and the sea has receded some distance across the green marshes. At Dover there is a Roman lighthouse, or *pharos*, on the castle hill hard by the Early Saxon church of St. Mary and within the precinct of the huge Norman castle, whose keep towers in a commanding position on the chalk cliff to guard the 'Key of England'. At few other places is there such a concentration of antiquities in so fine a position. Richborough and Reculver also have important remains of their Roman forts.

The coming of St. Augustine to Kent in 597 is an event of the first importance, for through him and his missionaries and their successors resulted the Christianizing of Britain, and the original foundation of many of those churches of which the country possesses such a magnificent series. Canterbury and Rochester must inevitably focus our attention as the earliest sees to be founded in King Ethelbert's kingdom. Canterbury is a small city packed with lovely things of almost every century from Augustine's time, and even before, down to our own. At the church of St. Martin may be seen in all probability the first building to be used for baptisms and congregational worship after Christianity was brought to these shores. In addition there are Abbeys, churches, religious hospitals, houses, inns, medieval walls and gates, culminating in perhaps the noblest of our cathedrals, see of the Primate of England. The building represents a continuous development from

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Romanesque, showing strong French influence in its choir, through all the fine range of Gothic, and owes no small measure of its magnificence to the generosity of pilgrims to Thomas à Becket's shrine. His murder in the cathedral in 1170, and Henry II's penance, were events that had nation-wide importance. The royal tombs and the early glass are perhaps the supreme ornaments of Canterbury. The mass of the cathedral as seen from St. Stephen's Hill, and the grouping of its three towers, is one of the finest things of its kind in England. Chaucer's Pilgrims would hardly recognize their road from London to Canterbury to-day. But they would still be able to pass under the same west gateway; and would be able to recognize their quarters in the East-bridge Hospital, even down to the thirteenth-century wall painting of Christ in Majesty on the refectory wall.

The other cathedral towns (of ancient foundation)—Rochester, Chichester, and Winchester—are hardly less interesting, though the first two are on a smaller scale. Chichester Cathedral has an air of great antiquity in its small, rather severe Norman nave; and the setting of the building, with its spire and detached bell-tower, is quite delightful. The old town has many charming survivals: considerable lengths of the medieval walls still exist and make pleasant walks; the market cross is a fine example of its type; and St. Mary's Hospital, a fourteenth-century foundation having chapel and almshouses, formerly the hospital hall, with great timber arcades under one roof, is unique.

Rochester shares with Canterbury and London the distinction of being one of the three earliest bishoprics, though St. Augustine's first reception there, when the

people hung fish-tails to his coat, was not encouraging. The cathedral has, like Chichester, a Norman nave, and contains much good work of later periods.

Of Winchester a bare hint must suffice. Its importance in Roman and later Saxon times was supreme, for it was at one time the capital of England, and the city, primarily, of that great national figure King Alfred. It lies cupped among the chalk downs, grey and ancient, clustering about the steep, narrow High Street leading down from one of the medieval gates near the castle. The city is less light and open than Canterbury, and seems sobered by the weight of years and the importance of the events and great characters with which it has been connected. The cathedral has no group of towers like Canterbury, no spire like Chichester to dominate the city. But though its exterior may be less impressive than some, it is in other respects as notable, and in some things supreme. Solid and dignified, it is the longest cathedral building in Europe, with a vast Perpendicular nave, casing earlier work. Norman masonry is evident in the heavy Romanesque design of the North transept. The superb chantries, and monuments of men who have made English history, cluster thickly about. St. Swithun, St. Birinus, Cnut and his Queen, William Rufus, Bishop Fox, Bishop Waynflete, and William of Wykeham are names that come immediately to mind. To the last we owe the college hard by, founded by him in 1382, as well as New College, Oxford. Not least of the interesting points to be seen in the cathedral are the mural paintings of many dates, showing Winchester to have been a great artistic centre in medieval times, one of many whose work we are beginning almost too late to realize and value.

The shores of these four counties we are considering

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witnessed other landings after those of Caesar and Augustine that were in their way as momentous. Of their roads of the Danes and Norsemen we need not concern ourselves, for their results as far as the beauty of Britain is concerned were mainly destructive. But the landing of William of Normandy, the Conqueror, near Hastings in 1066 not only changed the whole history of our island, but has left us to this day a wonderful legacy of military and ecclesiastical architecture that is among the prime beauties of South-eastern England. The list of castles, parish churches, and abbeys, newly founded by the Conqueror, his lords, and their successors, or rebuilt on the site of earlier foundations, is almost inexhaustible. Some of these buildings are ruinous, especially the Monasteries following their dissolution by Henry VIII in 1538; but even these have acquired the romantic beauty that such places possess. In this category is Battle Abbey, founded by the Conqueror himself, in performance of a vow, on the actual site of the Battle of Senlac. Parts of the later monastic buildings survive as a school; and the great gatehouse of 1338 remains almost intact. Some great houses now ruinous are Netley, Beaulieu, and Lewes. Others survive, wholly or in part, as parish churches. St. Cross, near Winchester, still dispenses the traditional dole of bread and beer to travellers; while Christchurch, on the banks of the Avon, Romsey, and Boxgrove, great monastic churches of Norman and later date, survive almost intact for worship at the present day.

A group of towns that must now claim our attention is that known as the Cinque Ports—Dover, Hythe, Hastings, Romney, and Sandwich, to which the two 'ancient towns' of Winchelsea and Rye, and numerous other

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

smaller places known as 'limbs' or 'members', were subsequently added. They were a strong confederacy for trade and naval defence, and in their prime were a great influence in England. The privileges and exemptions they received were very great. But in return, their responsibility in providing ships and men for the navy in time of war was equally considerable. Some idea of the importance of the Cinque Ports can be gained from the fact that at the siege of Calais no fewer than 105 vessels manned by 2,140 men came from these places. The office of Warden of the Cinque Ports exists to this day, although most of the 'ports' themselves are so only in name; for their later history is one of steady decline, mainly owing to changes in the coastline and the silting up of the harbours after the great storm of 1287 which swept away Old Winchelsea and blocked the Rhee channel. To-day, all except Dover, a busy channel port, and Hastings, which has become a modern watering-place, these once bustling towns dream away a peaceful existence, the sea having either blocked their harbours or actually receded some distance, leaving them high and dry. Winchelsea is now the smallest of them; and its peace and charm are unforgettable. The splendid Decorated church, with its ruined transepts, stands in a spacious churchyard on the hill, and contains the famous Alard tombs—Gervase Alard was Admiral of the Cinque Ports about 1300—amongst the finest of their kind in the South of England.

On the way in to Rye we catch a lovely glimpse from the medieval gateway, across the marsh to Camber Castle and the distant sea. Rye, isolated from modern development on its hill crowned by the old church, is a gem of its kind. Here, narrow, cobbled streets lined with

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ancient red-roofed houses climb the hill in a maze of twists and turns; and here medieval gate and tower still rise intact. From the Ypres Tower are wonderful views across the Marsh, with Lydd Church tower rising from its clump of trees, and the lighthouse at Dungeness showing in the far distance.

Rye is a good centre from which to explore Romney Marsh. It is a fascinating place; and, like all flat country, it has the joy of great expanses and crowded skies. It has an air of mystery, too, and great antiquity; and its isolated hamlets with their old churches and delicious names—Snave, Snargate, Brookland, Appledore, Ivy-church, and Newchurch (the latter no newer than the fourteenth century, however) are well worth a pilgrimage. The roads twist incomprehensibly between dyke and dyke, and one's only company is usually the flocks of sheep which graze on the fertile marshes.

From this flat area it is a pleasant change to turn to the woodlands of South-eastern England, of which something has already been said. Much of the Wealden timber was stripped for shipbuilding purposes, and for use in the numerous ironworks of Sussex, evidence of which can still be seen in the old 'hammer ponds' in many places. The term 'forest' is misunderstood by many people. It does not necessarily mean thickly wooded country; what area, for example, could be more treeless than Dartmoor Forest? St. Leonard's Forest near Horsham is, however, thickly wooded over most of its area, and is noted for its abundance of wild flowers, especially the lily of the valley, now increasingly rare in its wild state. Ashdown Forest, on the other hand, in addition to its woods, has large areas of open heath country, reaching, near Crowborough Beacon, over



700 feet, in a wild and lonely district. The woods of Kent are on the whole smaller in extent and in the size of their timber, many being composed of hazel and young oaks. But what they lack in scale is more than made up for by their intimate charm, by the small streams that meander through them, especially in the Weald, and by their spring carpet of primroses, bluebells, and anemones—thicker, I fancy, than in almost any other county. Surrey is particularly well wooded, especially around Leith Hill, Haslemere, and Linchmere; and Mrs. Allingham has probably done more to catch the spirit of this part in her pictures than anyone else.

But of all the woodland areas we have to consider, the New Forest must stand supreme. This beautiful tract of country occupies an area of almost 140 square miles in the south-west corner of Hampshire, having the Avon, beloved of fishermen, on the west and Southampton Water on the east. The greater part is Crown and public property, and formed one of the principal Royal Chases or hunting districts in the South. As in Ashdown Forest, there are large tracts of desolate, moor-like heath, such as parts of Beaulieu Heath and around Holmsley and Burley. All around Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst stretch glorious woods of oak and beech, while in other parts, as near Linford and Picket Post, newer plantations of dark fir stretch up to the bracken, heather and gorse of the heaths. To-day one can wander for miles and watch the deer and shaggy New Forest ponies without fear of incurring the hideous medieval penalties for interfering with the royal preserves. In the south-east corner lies Beaulieu at the head of the winding Beaulieu River creek, whose shores are thickly lined with trees. The village clusters around the remnants of the great Cistercian

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monastery founded by King John in 1204. At Bucklershard, a picturesque hamlet on the Beaulieu River, a ship-building yard was established in the early eighteenth century, and vessels were launched down a slipway that is now the empty village street, lined by ancient cottages, one of which, the Master-Builder's House, is now an hotel. A 'Hard' in Hampshire is the equivalent of a 'staithe' in Norfolk, and merely means a quay or landing. These waters, and the rivers and creeks of Lymington and Hamble are beloved of yachtsmen, to say nothing of the inlets beyond Portsmouth and Hayling Island, Langstone Harbour and Chichester Harbour. Cowes, in the Isle of Wight, is certainly to be ranked among the beauties of Britain during the Regatta week, and the island offers, as well, some pleasant scenery in its downs and chines, and its jolly villages of Carisbrook, Godshell, and Calborne. Southampton (while we are in this district), the greatest passenger port in England, has a fascination for all who love shipping; and the broad stretch of Southampton Water is a fitting approach to such a great port. In addition to this, the town retains many interesting medieval remains of its walls and gates.

Of the villages of South-eastern England it is almost impossible to speak in general terms, so varied are they in their types and materials. A good many of the most attractive have already been mentioned. In Kent, timber and plaster, and timber and brick, with thatched or more often tiled roofs, are the general thing for houses and cottages. Both here and in Sussex the hipped roof—that is to say, a roof sloping at the ends, instead of gabled—seems to be preferred. Sturry and Fordwich are among the most attractive villages; the latter, once the port of Canterbury, on the Stour, has interesting

relics of its former greatness in the old Town Hall. In Surrey there is a less individual type, and the village houses on the borders are indistinguishable from those of Kent and Sussex. Some of the best are at Witley, Dunsfold, and Chiddingfold. Sussex has a style that is very general in the county, and in Surrey; the upper storeys of cottages are hung with weather tiles, sometimes of curved pattern, or are weather-boarded, giving an effect of warmth and cosiness. Alfriston, Bramber, and Burwash in their long village streets show this very well, and the village of Bosham, overlooking Chichester Harbour, is one of the best in West Sussex. Horsham stone slates are often used for roofing; and the resultant mixture of brick, tile, timber, and stone is perfectly charming, particularly as the stone takes on a lovely golden tone with lichens. Brede Place, both as regards the house itself and its setting, is hard to surpass. In Hampshire, timber framing is general, and is even used in the remarkable churches of Mattingley and Hartley Wespall. But flint and stone, as well as brick, also occur.

Of the towns, apart from those already included, mention must be made of Maidstone, with its fine church and archbishop's palace overlooking the Medway; and of Aylesford, also on the river nearby, which has a delightful setting at the foot of the chalk downs. The almost continuous succession of seaside towns from Folkestone to the Hampshire border does not come within the scope of these pages.

From the towns and villages it is an easy step to their inhabitants. Early man has left his mark on this part of England. All along the downs is evidence of prehistoric works and camps, two of the finest being the Flint Mines at Cissbury, and Chanctonbury Ring in Sussex. The Long

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Man of Wilmington, cut in the steep north face of the downs near Alfriston, is still rather a puzzle as to date. In Kent are some highly interesting remains of camps, rock shelters, stone circles, and dolmens, which, moreover, will take the searcher into glorious country, such as Oldbury, near Ightham, Coldrum, near Trottescliffe, and Kit's Coty House, not far from Maidstone. Remains of Celtic field cultivation (terraces cut on the steep sides of hills) are to be seen in Hampshire.

The 'Men of Kent' and 'Kentish Men' have always been famed for their fortitude and staunchness, as witness the county's motto 'Invicta'. John Leland, the antiquary, quoting county characteristics from an earlier authority in his *Itinerary*, begun in 1538, describes Kent as 'Hoote as Fyre' and 'Sowseks full of dirt and myre'. Surrey is given as 'a Great bragere'. But at the present time both counties are so near to London that any individuality has been almost lost. Sussex, on the other hand, which St. Wilfred found so backward and chary of accepting the stranger until he had proved his good intentions, still retains some distinct characteristics of its own. The county was for long isolated by dense tracks of woodland, and by the 'dirt and myre' of its clayey Wealden areas; and so its people have remained refreshingly simple and direct. Its occupations have always been agricultural, and so the townsman, the Londoner, or indeed any 'foreigner', as anyone not a native of Sussex is called, is treated with some reserve. But once win a Sussex man's confidence and he is your friend for life. Hampshire, necessarily, has a big maritime element in its population, which makes its southern parts rather cosmopolitan; but in the north, among the downs, simple rural life still prevails.

Indeed, in all this part of England it is fortunate that the occupations of man have for countless centuries been almost wholly connected with the soil, resulting in beautification of the countryside rather than disfigurement. Sheep farming, of course, predominates: and in Romney Marsh, or on the downs of Kent, Sussex, and the wilder parts of Hampshire, you will always find the moving flocks dotted over the surface; and you may well meet an old shepherd who has never been to London. Farming of other sorts is also general; and it is interesting that the parishes in the Sussex Downs particularly, like those in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns, are long and narrow, thus giving the inhabitants a variety of soils—rich earth for their roots and other crops as well as the barren chalk downs suitable only for sheep grazing. In the wooded areas about Witley you may occasionally find saurle-makers at work in the spinneys of short chestnut. Kent of course, the 'Garden of England', has two occupations peculiarly its own—hop growing and fruit farming. The round oast houses with their conical roofs, for drying the hops, give to the Kentish landscape an individuality as charming as it is unusual. And anyone who has not seen Kentish cherry, apple, or plum orchards in bloom has not seen a vital piece of England. It is fortunate, scenically, that the Wealden Iron is no longer worked, and that the Kentish coal-field remains for the most part undeveloped.

There is no time to describe the many great houses in which this corner of England seems particularly rich. Where else could one find such a series as Knole, near Sevenoaks, the vast mansion of the Sackvilles; Penshurst, home of the Sidneys, near Tonbridge; Ightham Mote; Cowdray; Leeds, Allington, Hurstmonceaux, and





46 SPRING IN SUFFOLK: KERSEY MILL

## THE SOUTH COUNTRY

Bodiam Castles? Leeds Castle stands in the midst of a sheet of water; Hurstmonceux is a brick structure lying in a secluded dell; and Bodiam, bequeathed to the nation by Lord Curzon, is surely the most lovely of castles. Its outline, as conceived by Sir Edward Dalyngrudge in 1386, is almost unimpaired. It rises with its battlemented corner and intermediate towers sheer from the waters of a surrounding lake—in summer, gay with water-lilies and embowered in trees. But seen as I saw it last, with not a soul about, late on a quiet winter afternoon, through the tracery of bare trees, the sunset glinting in the water of the Rother, whose stream flows near by, its beauty was unforgettable.

Many people have painted or written of the beauty of these English counties: Gilbert White has made Selborne on the Hampshire-Surrey border peculiarly his own. Rudyard Kipling has championed Sussex—in particular one remembers his verses:

God gives all men all earth to love,  
But since man's heart is small  
Ordains for each one spot shall prove  
Beloved over all.  
Each to his choice, and I rejoice  
The lot has fallen to me  
In a fair ground—in a fair ground—  
Yea, Sussex by the sea!

One's abiding memory of all this part of England will probably be of the great woods and high broken heathland; and of the long line of the downs, dappled with moving shadows, and, as Martin Armstrong describes them, 'with great crowns of shining cloud, with wheeling plover, and short grass sweet with the small white clover'. It is a picture of England that we must never allow to be marred.



Charles Fry

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THE  
EAST COUNTRY  
AND THE FENS

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IF the exact boundaries of the present 'East Anglia' have still to be defined, those of the region for these purposes called the East Country, embracing that whole province with the Fens and a little more, can be stated at once quite explicitly. On the south of it is the Thames estuary, on the east the North Sea, and on the west the railway main line from London to Grantham—though there we should change trains and take the branch line that wanders east by north to Boston. The area resulting embraces parts of Lincolnshire and Hertfordshire, a flick of Bedfordshire, much of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdon, and all of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, the last three counties forming the familiar coastal bulge of East Anglia, rather in the shape of a human ear.

Physically, the Fens constitute an area of high specialization, self-contained both as regards landscape and

## THE EAST COUNTRY

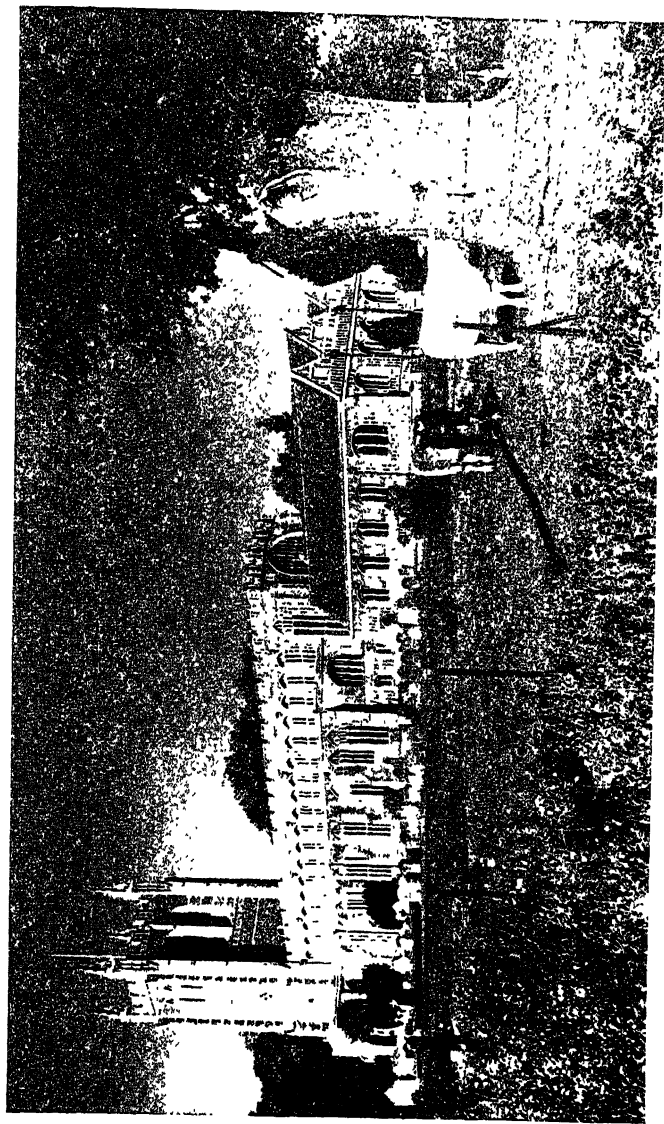
history, which will be described later by itself. For the rest, the country is a sweeping plain of slight undulation exposed to the dry, cold winds of the North Sea: a land in low relief but by no means flat, which, apart from its stretches of particular beauty or character, has a rural and quietly pastoral aspect that is very much its own. Anyone belonging to this country, dropped into it by chance from an aeroplane, would know at once that he was in Eastern England, though he might find it difficult to say by what means. What is more, a good East Anglian could probably soon gauge his bearings from the signs of settlement around him—a pink-washed cottage gable, a little ruined church with a round tower standing forlorn in the fields, or a great flint tower of fine austerity topping the next rise. It is certain that he would not have to look far for such signs, for in no other part of England is habitation so evenly distributed. The East Country, luckily for itself, has escaped much of the disgrace of nineteenth-century industrial concentration. Its manufactures, which are varied and active, are, with few exceptions, dependent upon agricultural production—either deriving from it or supplying its needs. If ever a district had a staple industry, that industry is agriculture in Eastern England.

This has not always been the case. For a period of 400 years or more, from the dawn of the fifteenth century to the close of the eighteenth, it was the industrial hub of England, the centre of its widespread and prosperous trade in wool. Up to the fifteenth century the country had grown rich on the export of its raw materials to Flanders, chiefly of wool, which was shipped from the East Anglian ports with Norfolk barley for the great breweries of Ghent and Bruges. The connection with

the Low Countries was of long standing, and it is not surprising that Flemish methods, and even peaceful colonies of Flemish craftsmen, should soon have found their way into the province and there laid the foundations of an outpost textile industry on their own account, introducing at the same time two factors of much importance in its later development—the turnip and the brick.

While lack of water-power always limited their products, the East Anglian weavers were able to establish a virtual monopoly in long-wool fabrics of a certain type, some of which took their names from the villages and small towns where they were first made, as ‘worsted’ and ‘kerseymere’. The industry was inclined to be local in character, centred in small settlements each ruled over patriarchally by a magnate family (the Spryngs of Lavenham were a case in point), whose dignity and munificence is still reflected in fine old houses in town and country, and in the stately flint churches, with their ‘flushwork’ patterning and great towers, that remain one of the prides of the district. If the tide of this industry has ebbed, the beauty of some of its smaller centres, deriving directly from their late-medieval prosperity, remains an abiding thing.

It was not until steam-power had revolutionized textile production in about the forties of the last century that this old trade, a hundred miles away from the nearest coal, finally succumbed to the competition of Yorkshire. The East Anglians, obstinately resourceful and with the wise backing of their Quaker banks, resigned themselves to the inevitable, and set about the establishment of a new group of light industries, mostly of the milling and agricultural sort, that has survived and prospers to this day. But it is interesting that the threads of continuity



47 AN EAST-ANGLIAN 'WOOL' CHURCH: LONG MELFORD, SUFFOLK



48 AN EAST-ANGLIAN MILL AT TOPPESFIELD, SUFFOLK

in textile manufacture were never completely snapped, for, from the colony of Huguenot weavers whose looms were busy in the Colne Valley as early as the seventeenth century, there has developed the great firm of Courtauld, whose artificial silk products have a world market.

The Norfolk husbandry that has so impressed its character upon the East Anglian farmlands was a more recent innovation. This system, which is still observed with some fidelity throughout much of the province, was consolidated towards the close of the eighteenth century by the influence of a notable local agriculturist and sportsman, Thomas Coke of Holkham, afterwards Earl of Leicester, who adapted it from the experiments of a line of inquiring landowners reaching back to the ingenious 'Turnip' Townshend. With a public spirit typical of his great family, Coke created what must have been the first experimental farm on the light sandy soil of his native North Norfolk, there perfecting a system that worked a speedy revolution in local methods. Broadly speaking, the key to this system was the introduction of the turnip into the crop rotation, thus immensely improving the breed of sheep and so fertilizing the land that for the first time a wheat crop became practicable—though barley remained, and remains, the dominant cereal. Coke's own dictum was the best formula for this Norfolk farming: 'No fodder no beasts, no beasts no manure, no manure no crop'. Nevertheless in these days, when, with cheap importations from overseas, the wheat crop has ceased to be the spoilt child of the English farmer, Norfolk husbandry is coming in for a good deal of criticism. Rivals are appearing in the dairy-farming of the Marshlands and the sugar beet of Breckland and the Fens

—and the Norfolk turkey is again very much in the ascendant.

In so productive a farming country the markets are naturally numerous, and the small country town is one of the most characteristic features of the East Anglian scene. These little places have a charm of their own, with their broad market places, and streets of low colour-washed houses, their gabled halls and inns and great churches of flint. Small towns such as Watton and Fakenham in Norfolk, Eye and Clare in Suffolk, Dedham and Thaxted in Essex exist in their scores all over East Anglia in a somnolence that is only broken by the bustle of the weekly market—the delight of the antiquarian and the despair of the commercial traveller. In Norfolk at least the villages come a bad second, shabby little places for the most part, though Suffolk and Essex can show some of the loveliest and least spoilt village groups in England. Beyond the houses spread the fields with their abundant hedgerow timber, occasionally broken by the dark patch of a thicket or a compact farm group around a homestead, which may be anything from a gabled and pargeted hall of the sixteenth century to a solid residence in brick of the nineteenth.

In these surroundings live and work the East Anglians, a race long distinguished for its industry and defiant independence; a race to which Havelock Ellis has assigned the largest proportion of genius among British peoples, which has produced for posterity such impressively contrasting figures as John Crome, Cardinal Wolsey, Oliver Cromwell, Horatio Nelson, and Sir Thomas Browne. Among its cultural achievements the province can boast a distinctive school of agriculture and one, if not two, great schools of landscape painting. Its

peasants have defeated two royal armies; it has sent out ships to fight the Armada and raised a phalanx, almost Roman in its disciplined effectiveness, against Stuart prerogative. Its steady leftward trend in churchmanship and politics is typical of its long insistence on an open mind in matters of the spirit—an attitude in part explained by its historic 'island' quality, the sea to north and east and to the west the Fens, 'a labyrinth of black, wandering streams, broad lagoons, morasses submerged every spring-tide, vast beds of reed and sedge and fern', impenetrable to any but a native.

Something of this separateness has entered into its buildings. If in domestic work it assimilated the delicate brickwork and crow-stepped gable of Flanders, it handled them with an originality that makes the East Anglian manor-house—which can be seen at its best, rose-pink, with tall gatehouse and twisted chimneys, at East Barsham, Stoke-by-Nayland and Moyns—a major Tudor achievement. The churches have already been touched upon; whatever their size—and they range from some of the vastest to some of the minutest in the country—there is no mistaking their severe external lines, without parapet or superfluous ornamentation, or the gaunt dignity of their towers. Within, their richness of craftsmanship, particularly in roofs and screens, expresses something of the pride in worship of the old weavers and merchants, and the wealth at their command. The traces of East Anglian monasticism, however slight, remaining in places such as Crowland, Bury, and Walsingham, once the holiest ground in England, show similarly how high was its culture and generous its style of living. This spacious tradition did not end with the Middle Ages. East Anglia abounds in large estates that have always



attracted rich people for the pleasantness of their scenery and the resources of their sport. Its greatest houses provide an epitome of domestic ostentation from sixteenth-century Audley End to nineteenth-century Somerleyton, while in Norfolk an intermediate group includes four at least of the most delightful productions of the Late Renaissance in Raynham, Wolterton, Melton Constable, and Houghton.

Holkham, the great Palladian house of Thomas Coke and of the Earls of Leicester, is, with the possible exception of the diminished Audley End, the largest and grandest of these East Anglian seats. Its park drops to an expanse of grazing marshes, beyond which are pine-crested dunes leading down to broad sands and to the sea. From here to Cromer is perhaps one of the most individual stretches of coast scenery in England. First there is the village-port of Wells, with its pantiled cottages and narrow alleys, small coasting-boats, from heaven knows where, making their way up its mile-long channel to unload at its little quay. Thence, skirting a lonely bird and plant kingdom of salt marshes, or 'Meals', and making its way through bashful Stiffkey, the road arrives at Blakeney—a steep street of flint cottages climbing to a vast church famous for its medieval beacon tower. Cley follows with another great church and a silted harbour that sent out whalers to Iceland and ships against the Armada, and beyond Salthouse, lonely among its marshes, you arrive, rather unexpectedly, at the crumbling cliffs and Edwardian boarding-houses of Sheringham, Cromer, and their satellite resorts.

Inland, North Norfolk is not nearly so flat as would appear from the almost uniform green of Bartholomew; East Beckham, on the ridge of the 'Cromer Heights',

## THE EAST COUNTRY

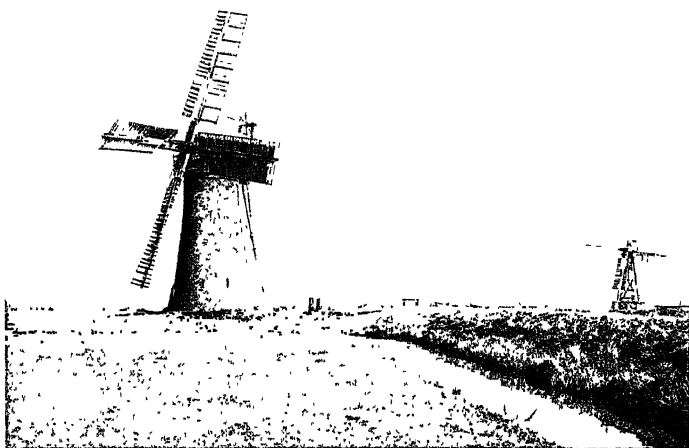
is, indeed, at 327 feet, probably the highest point in the county. All around lie rolling farmlands, dotted with homesteads and hamlets and seamed with small green valleys like that of the Nar, that winds so pleasantly through Castleacre and Litcham. Here also is a group of market towns as typical as any in East Anglia, and a succession of wooded estates (including the adorable Jacobean Blickling) that provide pheasant shooting as abundant as any in England.

At the western edge of this district, on the frontier of the Fen country, is King's Lynn, which cannot be dismissed without a few sentences. This is decidedly one of the most attractive small towns in England. Its memories reach back far into the Middle Ages, when its merchant ships maintained a trade with the Hansa ports and its whalers sailed northward to Greenland. Its old prosperity is reflected in its two great medieval churches of St. Margaret and St. Nicholas, its flint chequer-work Guildhall and Restoration Custom House, and its capacious merchants' houses, one with a watch tower overlooking the quay, giving glimpses of green yards and mellow brick that inevitably recall Vermeer.

On the southern fringe of it lies Norwich, which, more than any other English town, with the exception of Exeter, has an air of the capital of a province. It is a city of yards and lanes rather than of broad streets and open spaces, though in the centre of it, in the shadow of the great church of St. Peter Mancroft, lies one of the largest market-places in England, a scene of much noise and animation on a Saturday night, when the flaring alleys between the stalls are choked with the country people who pour in from far around in motor-coaches and vast red and white two-decker buses. Few places

are so confusing to the stranger. The twisting streets, with their picturesque medieval names, connect a tangle of old courts, public-houses (there are over 400 in Norwich!) and flint parish churches of all sizes and of a moving dignity and beauty. There are still thirty-eight of them left (there were over fifty at the time of the Reformation), and they range from the stately immensity of St. Peter Mancroft and St. Michael Coslany to half-forgotten little buildings with names as sweet as St. Peter Parmentergate and St. Michael-at-Plea. Then there are old halls such as that of St. Andrew, once the nave of a great friars' church, the fourteenth-century Strangers' Hall that is now a museum, and the chequer-work Guildhall of the city. There are Colman's great mustard factory, and boot and shoe factories by the score, and a printing industry that produced this book. In the midst, walled like a citadel and entered through flint gateways that are still closed each evening, is the cathedral, whose spire dominates the surrounding country, in a setting of lawns and trees and old houses.

North-east of Norwich begins the very individual region of half-reclaimed marshes called Broadland, which no amount of tourist invasion or publicity can quite spoil. Here a group of sluggish rivers, some of them rising only a mile or two from the sea, wind among flat water-meadows of rich green, and reed-filled meres varying from secluded lakelets to expanses wide as inland seas. Most of these rivers, such as the Bure, the Ant and the Thurne, have for centuries served as the arteries of a leisurely traffic of wherries between the coast and the agricultural hinterland. These wherries, with their big dark sails, are poled or 'quanted' when the breeze is insufficient—a herculean exercise that produced



49 DRAINAGE MILLS ON THE NORFOLK MARSHES, NEAR  
LUDHAM



50 THE BARLEY HARVEST AT DISS, NORFOLK



51 HORNING FERRY ON THE NORFOLK BROADS

a herculean breed, now inevitably on the decline. For the light pleasure craft that skim these waters this is, perhaps, something of a relief, for the bluff laden wherry is a ruthless vehicle to meet in a narrow channel. But from the picturesque point of view the Broads will never be the same without the sight of dark sails moving gently above bright meadows filled with cattle—for all the world as though they were taking a cross-country walk.

If, in high summer, Horning Ferry is a miniature Margate and the Bure recalls a regatta, there are less familiar channels up which you can still make your way to discover dykes and meres empty of life save for the waterfowl that rustle in the reeds and plants or pass screeching overhead. Sunset, like dawn, is an unforgettable experience on these waters in the ruddy light of the afterglow, when distant trees are etched in tiny silhouette upon the horizon's rim and vast white moths come fluttering about the lantern. A summer day can be passed here very peacefully in fishing, bathing and sailing, with an occasional landing at a village 'staithe' for a glass of beer at the pub or a visit to one of the rather gaunt Broadland churches—Ranworth, perhaps, or Ludham, or Barton Turf—to see the worn but still vivacious screen-paintings of kings, apostles and martyrs for which they are famous. Or the more serious sailor can make his way down the Bure to Yarmouth, a meeting place of many waters, where he can explore the quays and alleys of the old town and regret the incongruous restoration of England's largest parish church.

To the west of Norwich lies Breckland, an open heath country extending from Swaffham in the north almost to Bury in the south. Its sandy soil has always largely resisted cultivation, and has thus preserved many

interesting traces of prehistoric tracks and earthworks, to say nothing of an industry of flint-knapping that is still carried on at Brandon much as it was in neolithic times. The landscape of the heaths is treeless save for an occasional clump of ragged pine; but in early summer, when the bracken is waist-high and the gorse is flowering, they are pleasant, fragrant places provided the sun is not too scorching, and then it is a relief to come suddenly on a smooth deep mere, perfect for bathing. In winter they are less inviting, when blackened heather and dead bracken reveal something of the infertility of the land, stretching in bony undulations to a blue distance and swept by shrill winds from the North Sea. Where the ground is more fertile are to be found broad fields of sugar beet grown for the factories at Lynn, Bury and Ely, and plantations of small conifers that help to supply the perennial demand for Christmas trees. But it is difficult to escape for long from open heath.

To the south-west Breckland ends in the turf of Newmarket Heath; to the south-east it shades into 'High Suffolk'. Here once again the landscape is entirely pastoral, swelling into gentle ridges, the crests of which carry little but the hedgerows and an occasional coppice or farmstead. It is a surprise to discover the much lower level of the fresh little valleys of watermeads, with their lines of 'pollarded' willow, studded with hamlets, churches and substantial houses. Thus, from the plateau, only the lonely tower of Kersey Church cuts the skyline; the hidden village sweeps downward to its stream water-splash and climbs again, in an adorable ascent of gabled weavers' houses, to the churchyard gate. Lavenham near by, with its timbered houses and splendid 'wool' church, stands at the entrance to just such another

## THE EAST COUNTRY

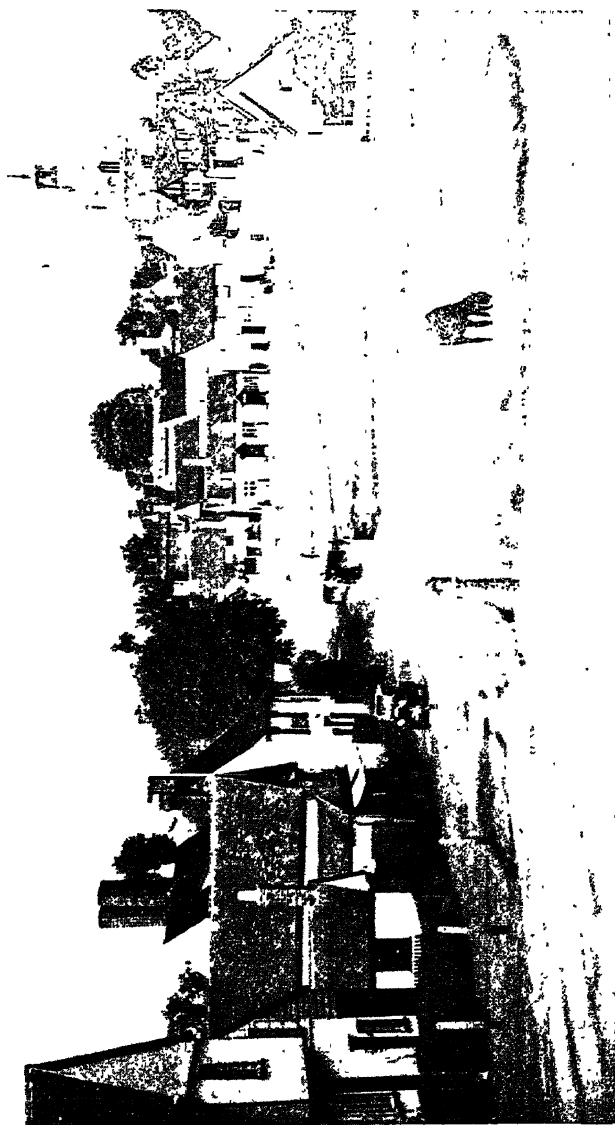
valley, in which a small Stour feeder winds through soft and verdant country by Brent Eleigh, Monk's Eleigh and Bildeston. These little places are pleasantly typical of the mid-Suffolk village, which at its best is as beautiful as any that England can offer, with gabled cottages colour-washed in fresh pinks and greens and browns around a stately church. At Hawkedon the church rises from a broad green, and Hartest, which obstinately refuses to sit for its photograph, is perhaps most attractive of all.

Suffolk may also be proud of its towns: Eye, with its church of patterned flint and air of a village despite its 3,000 inhabitants and weekly market; Beccles and Bungay on their mutual river; Mildenhall, on the verge of the Fens, with its wide street and timber market-house; Stowmarket, Saxmundham and several more. Bury St. Edmunds has quiet streets, capacious inns and two vast churches, and is certainly worth visiting, though only a gateway and a bell-tower remain to speak of its monastic eminence. Ipswich, the county town, at the head of its long estuary, is rich in association and interest whether you visit its old churches and houses with their memories of Wolsey and Mr. Pickwick, its riverside factories and maltings, or the port of Harwich, where you may watch the mail packet leaving for the Hook of Holland. But perhaps most charming are the places that lie along the Stour, whose mills and creeks were painted so lovingly by Constable and Gainsborough—Nayland, Sudbury, Long Melford, and Clare, with their neighbouring villages of Dedham, Stoke-by-Nayland, Cavendish. There is a calm and sense of well-being about this country that held a particular fascination for Constable. 'The beauty of the surrounding scenery,' he wrote, 'its



gentle declivities, the luxuriant meadow-flats sprinkled with flocks and herds, its well-cultivated uplands, its woods and rivers with numerous scattered villages and churches, farms and picturesque cottages, all impart to this particular part an elegance hardly anywhere else to be found.' If 'elegance' has perhaps changed its implication, the scene has altered little in the hundred years or so that have passed since Constable painted it, and the Stour still expresses, perhaps as completely as anywhere, the quiet beauty of England at its best, which explains the choice of our frontispiece to this volume.

Over the river from Clare begin chalk uplands whose undulations would alone refute the legend that Essex is flat. To the average Londoner this county still means little more than the dull flats of the Thames and the coastal fringe around Clacton, though here, only some forty miles from his door, is a district as remotely 'country' as any that England can offer, a plateau-land of intensive arable farming broken by steep little valleys, often charmingly wooded, along which most of the villages are strung. There is the upper Cam Valley by Saffron Walden—incidentally a very charming old town indeed—with its pleasant group of Littlebury, the Chesterfords and Ickleton; there is the valley of the Upper Chelmer by Thaxted, a small town famous for its spired church, moot hall and timber houses; and there is the valley of the Pant, which has a small-scale freshness typical of the best in East Anglian scenery, connecting a string of 'field' villages, little known but unsurpassed in the grouping of their white plastered houses: Panfield, Wethersfield, the Bardfields, and, loveliest of all, Finchingfield (here illustrated). Nobody can claim to know England thoroughly till he has visited these.



52 LOVELIEST OF ESSEX VILLAGES: FINCHAM



53 THE WITHAM AT BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE



54 ELY: THE CATHEDRAL AND 'ELY PORTA'

## THE EAST COUNTRY

Above, the landscape is one of rolling fields, with scanty hedgerow timber but occasional patches of woodland, stretching to the 400-foot ridge escarpment (beneath which runs the immemorial Icknield Way) which gives such majestic views over the Cambridgeshire levels, almost treeless but punctuated by many village spirelets. Eastward, the land sinks through the typical corn-growing country of mid-Essex to the flats of the Colne, Blackwater and Crouch estuaries, reedy haunts of waterfowl and yachtsmen. To the south is the Thames Estuary, with its slow procession of shipping, fringed by dormitory towns from Southend to the City; and while it is doubtful how long the patch of real country around Ongar will remain unspoilt, it is good to think that, in the glades of Epping, a fragment at least has been preserved of the forest that once covered most of primeval Essex.

## THE FENS

Anyone who climbs the tall western tower of Ely Cathedral on a clear day will be rewarded by a view unforgettable in its sweep and character. In the foreground are the farmlands of the Isle of Ely, dotted with villages and homesteads; beyond, the land sinks to a flat expanse of alluvial fenland, intensive in its cultivation, bounded on all sides by the horizon except to the south-east, where the view ends in the low line of the Cambridgeshire chalk escarpment. Almost treeless, the fields are endlessly intersected by drains and runnels, while to the north-west, as though drawn across the country with a ruler, is the embanked double cut of the Bedford Rivers that carry the Ouse waters over the levels from Earith to Denver Sluice.

This vista, of course, only constitutes a southerly slice of the million acres odd of reclaimed farming country that keeps its old name of the Fens—the most artificial, yet in many ways one of the most distinctive, of the regions here under review. A description at length will need no justification to anyone who has crossed it on an April morning, when big white clouds chase one another lazily over a vast sky, or on a frosty evening in January, when the sun drops like a red ball over the horizon and the afterglow lingers in the waters. Bad weather, at the same time, can induce a depression unprecedented in other surroundings, and the winter bleakness must be experienced through long months to be realized. Yet the Fens have a real beauty: not the careless English beauty of hill and stream and meadow, but one of wide spaces and restless skylscapes, a beauty that alters its features with every variation of the weather, and demands a tribute to each of its changing moods.

The landscape is bound up with its history. In its primeval state, the district was an overgrown waterlogged morass, some 70 by 30 miles in its outer dimensions, surrounding the lower basins of the four Midland rivers that empty into the Wash—Witham, Welland, Nene, and Ouse. In winter it was like an inland sea; in summer it was a reedy swamp, pooled with stagnant meres that were alive with fish and wildfowl. Its few inhabitants lived on the patches of firm ground that in winter stood out like islands above a clouded sea, and scraped an odd amphibious living by fishing, fowling, and snaring, if need be making their way across the floods on stilts. In *Hereward the Wake* Kingsley has sketched the life of this half-nourished, half-savage people in what was a traditional home of lost causes. As

monasticism developed, it is not surprising that its sterner orders should have been attracted to these remote island sites, far removed from the turbulence of medieval life, that were gradually transformed by them into green oases about their mighty churches. Such were Crowland, Thorney, Ramsey and Chatteris, where fragments of the abbeys remain, and, greatest in extent and importance, the Isle of Ely, where the Norman minster still stands out grandly above the levels.

The problem of reclamation, that has puzzled the engineers of almost every generation since the time of the Romans, has been how to carry the river drainage of the central Midlands over these flat marshes, often lower in level than the sea itself, to the silted inlet of the Wash. The first tentative efforts to drain the country west of King's Lynn probably dated from very early times indeed, and to these the Romans added an earth embankment that partly remains, the long importance of which is recalled in local place-names such as *Walpole*, *Walton*, and *Walsoken*. The attempts of the monastic proprietors, though individually successful, were local in character, though it is to his credit that Cardinal Morton, while Bishop of Ely, cut the forty-foot drain that still survives in part as Morton's Leam. In the neighbourhood of Wisbech, a further attempt was made during the reign of James I by that remarkable man Chief Justice Popham, with a company of Adventurers, but it was not until some forty years later that the first comprehensive scheme was inaugurated by the Dutch engineer Sir Cornelius Vermuyden, under the patronage of Francis, Duke of Bedford, using for labour consignments of prisoners of war from Scotland and from his own country. To this enterprise belonged the cutting of the

Bedford Rivers to short-circuit the Ouse, and the drainage of the Bedford Level. The name of its originator is perpetuated in the long, straight forty-foot cut that is still sometimes referred to as 'Vermuyden's Eau'.

There is no space for a comparison of the systems of Vermuyden and, at a later date, Smeaton, Rennie and Telford, which have resulted in a workable but far from ideal compromise that even nowadays renders the Fen drainage a difficult and expensive operation. It suffices that, except for a few insignificant patches such as Wicken Fen near Cambridge, purposely preserved in its original state, the whole area is now under cultivation, yielding a vast annual produce of cereals and root-crops, with, as later developments, the fruit of the Wisbech district, the bulbs of Spalding, and the post-war sugar beet which has brought into being a great new factory at Ely. The soil, though simple and recent in its constituents, is of two distinct types which produce somewhat varying landscapes. Broadly speaking, the fringes of the Wash are of a silt formation on which houses can be built and trees grown freely, with the result that here habitation is fairly evenly distributed, and the views less open. The outer fringe of peat soil, however, is bare of trees and largely unsuitable for building; and the fields of crops sweep to the skyline in unbroken vistas save for an occasional farm-house on higher ground in its grove of trees, or the long line of a drain embankment, with its thin fringe of ash or willow and oddly perched houses.

While the district is bordered by market centres, its towns, with a few notable exceptions, are rather nondescript in character, huddles of white Arlesey brick about the stately tower or spire of a great church, whose

fittings will almost certainly repay examination—for instance, the double hammer-beam roof of the older church at March, with its galaxy of over a hundred carved angels. In the north, Boston is a small hub of rural activity miles from one of the great main roads, a comfortably bustling little place that is well worth visiting if only to see the big lantern-like church of St. Botolph, with its tall, tapering ‘Stump’, that is a major landmark of the district. Wisbech, miles from any rising ground, has good inns and sedate rows of brick Georgian houses on its ‘Brinks’ fronting the canalized Nene, for all the world like Holland. Ely is a village city beneath the stone cliffs of its cathedral, its old houses grouped around little greens, its walled close dropping steeply to the Fen level. Each of these towns has its distinctive charm; but perhaps most attractive of the marshland places are the group of parishes scattered between the roads west of King’s Lynn—the Walpoles, Wiggenhalls, Tilneys, Terringtons—each with its church like a young cathedral, at first half hidden, as you approach it, by tree fringes, then breaking on the view quite suddenly with the inevitable right-angle turn of the Fen lane. Two at least of the Wiggenhalls, St. Mary the Virgin and St. Germans, beyond the pretty seclusion of their surroundings, should be visited for the remarkable bench-end carvings within their churches. In its green field, the mighty church of Terrington St. Clement dwarfs the few scattered houses around it, while that at Walpole St. Peter, untouched by the restorer, preserves a beauty that is achieved by few buildings, setting one wondering how such magnificence came into being in such surroundings.



Sir William Beach Thomas

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MIDDLE ENGLAND:  
*THE GRASS FARMING AND HUNTING  
COUNTRY*

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ONE of the proudest titles attached to any bit of England is 'The Shires'. It may be compared with 'The Lakes'; but there is an obvious pre-eminence—in England at any rate—in the lakes of Westmorland and Cumberland. There is no obvious superiority in any of those counties that boast the attribute of the definite article. In a general vote for the loveliest county not one of them would earn a place. 'The Home Counties', a title more affectionate than proud, have little more justification for this sobriquet, except perhaps that they touch the skirts of the mother city. It may be argued that 'The Shires' owe their claim to the insolent assurance of the hunting crowd that "unting is the sport o' kings", and where it flourishes in greatest perfection there is the perfect country."

Nevertheless, the central Shires that stretch, say,



55 A GRASS FARM OF 'MIDDLE ENGLAND': SNITTERFIELD, WARWICKSHIRE



56 A MIDLAND VILLAGE OF THE STONE BELT: GEDDINGTON,  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

## MIDDLE ENGLAND

between London and Birmingham and Retford are peculiarly English; and one of the first claims of England is that beauty breaks out suddenly—like a lyric phrase in an epic—in the most uncompromising places. You turn from the high road at a cutting in the chalk, showing no more than a barren inch or two of soil above it, and suddenly you are in a Ewelme. The trees, the church in the dell, the old cottages, the peace and deep quiet are as a nugget in a mine, an oasis in a desert. The charm radiates outwards, and you come to feel that the scattered trees, which are as peculiar a mark of England as the hedgerows themselves, are a park-like approach to other groups of homes.

The few famous views in the Home Counties and in the North Midlands express England supremely. Geographically and spiritually the centre of England is in Warwickshire near Stratford on Avon; and no view is more characteristic of trees, hedgerows, fields, and villages than the plain and valley of the Avon as you see them below you from the upper slopes of Sunrising Hill. The view of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire from the chalk ridge, on which Iyvinghoe Beacon is the most salient spot, is similarly English. You could not call Aylesbury (where the ducks come from) a beautiful town or consider its low plain comparable, say, with Lombardy, but standing on the short sweet grass that is the glory of the chalk ridge, on the Chilterns as on the South Downs, and gazing towards the spires of Oxford across those be-treed and hamleted plains, you must acknowledge a homely attraction not easily paralleled in other lands, in other counties.

From several angles we are forced to the acknowledgment that the Midlands are the nucleus of England. No

one, I think, quite knows why or even how; but round about Chaucer's time Middle English, which is very nearly the same as Midland English, won hands down in the battle of competitive dialects and drove off the too Latin invaders. It has been said that the monasteries about the Nene, that slow Northamptonshire river, concluding its course in the Fens, were the matrix of the English tongue. Much that is most English has its home thereabouts. In a war-time discussion on the best troops one critic said, 'Give me a Midland labourer. Put him where you will and tell him what to do, and no force in the world, short of death, will stop him doing it'. The stiffness of his clay soil is in his character.

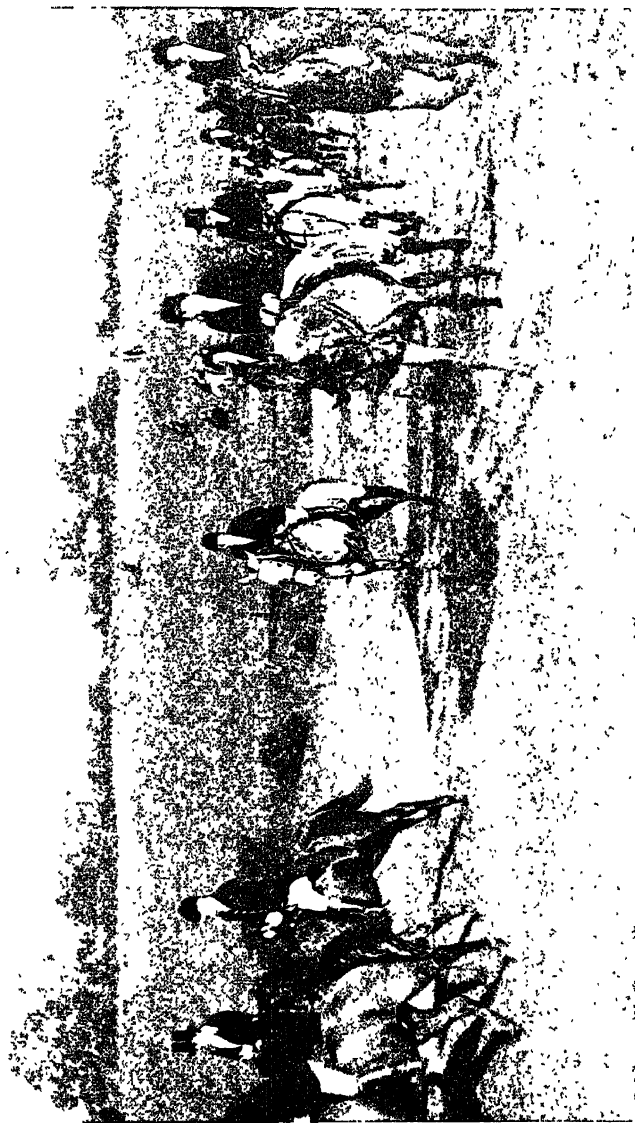
It is worth notice that in the campaign for the preservation of rural England the most practical examples of the best method come not from the conventional centres of beauty, that are printed on the lists arranged for American trippers, but from the heart of the Midlands. In Leicester itself and in the country round the town Mr. Peach, one of its citizens, first discovered the right method. He made a sort of pictorial survey by aid of the photograph, and started a travelling exhibit illustrating the right and the wrong way to treat this England, both architecturally in the town itself and scenically in the country places. He was the first to reconcile the mutually exclusive benefits of giving the public access to the woods and yet preserving parts of them as sanctuaries; and the woods near Leicester are an old and glorious forest. His example became a standard and was an invaluable stimulus.

A closely parallel accomplishment, due to Mr. Masefield, a cousin of the Poet Laureate (and herein we may find a symbol) has been recorded in Staffordshire. Of the wild places of cultivated England few are more

surpassingly beautiful than Hawksmoor. How suddenly you come upon this glen of trees and gorse, a place of glorious recreation for the workers in the great towns. Since its preservation for the public it has increased its value also as a sanctuary. The people who refresh themselves in its native wildness acknowledge the sanctity of the hinterland. Doubtless as you go north from the flat and some would say the dull plains of Leicestershire and Northampton (where the boots come from) you reach on the way towards the Five Towns a wilder and more attractive scenery; but the granite quarries of the true Midlands indicate the vertebræ that lie below this grace of form; and both Leicestershire and Northamptonshire are much more varied than their general reputation.

These counties, as their names denote, are the paradise of the hunting-man for reasons intrinsic to the landscape. At the heat of an election campaign Lord Willoughby de Broke, a famous Master of Foxhounds, was asked by a hostile critic what was the chief industry in his district. He replied with instant confidence 'Fox 'unting'; and the inevitable cheer followed. The interrupter had extracted the answer he wanted; but it recoiled on his own head. In literature, as in fact, the core of the pastime has been Market Harboro', where before the war hunting was certainly the chief industry; and there too were trained the best cross-bred horses, to wit, hunters, known outside Ireland. The reason for the pre-eminence has been largely the great grass fields and the blackthorn and quick-set hedges. The same reason that has made the district the home of the grazier has made it the home of hunting. The grass is firm and rich and widely spread. Stock fatten and flourish on it as they fatten in few places—again outside central Ireland. Over their feeding-grounds

the thoroughbred, or near thoroughbred, can stretch his stride as at Newmarket or Ascot Heath, and the international group who collected there early in the century exulted in speed. It meant perhaps too much; and it was a common charge against this crowd that they would pay any price for extra speed on the flat; but there were always the quickset hedges to bring things level. A less highly polished and aristocratic hunting prevailed a little farther east; but it is all hunting country, and the home of famous packs, some called from historic houses, as the Belvoir, named from the castle of the Dukes of Rutland; some from great families, as the Fitzwilliam, whose country is chiefly in Huntingdon; some just from places as the Pytchley, or Woodland Pytchley, who come nearer to Melton Mowbray, which has at intervals outclassed even Market Harboro'. The 'Meltonians' were both mocked and applauded as the aristocracy of the sport. Most of the great hunts exulted in grass as the graziers exulted in it; but where the Midlands begin, so to say, on the east, and the clay slopes rise from the peat and clay of the Fens, the country, though heavy and rather flat, is 'first-class wheat and bean land', in the standard phrase of catalogues when any sale of farmland was toward. Some of the most characteristic hunting country is over mixed farms of grass and arable. No bit more nicely illustrative of the Midlands could be found than the neighbourhood of the winter kennels of the Fitzwilliam. There is a grass and wooded hill, whose trees out-top the church spire, and it is known as Buckworth Wood. Down the shallow valley and up the hounds run to Salome Wood, a long, narrow stretch of wood, very lovely in spring with anemone, bluebell, and primrose. It is too thin to hide a fox long,



57 HUNTING IN THE SHIRES: THE QUORN AT BEEBY, LEICESTERSHIRE





58 A GREAT HOUSE OF THE MIDLANDS: COMPTON VERNEY, WARWICKSHIRE

and he breaks across a mile of ploughland to Hamerton Grove. If you want to know what Milton was thinking of when he wrote:

Towers and battlements he sees  
Bosomed high in tufted trees,

look down on the village by the brook and see the square splendid tower, most characteristic of Huntingdon and Northampton, half hidden among the tall elms. The grove has broad rides and the fox is viewed across each before he breaks again across the grass and over the small, sluggish brook to Gidding Gorse, another short mile away. There you may leave them, to look at the famous chapel of the Ferrar community at Steeple and Little Giddings, and look over a country which has grown greener and greener with grass supplanting plough as the value of the land has sunk and the population dwindled.

A scene better known though not more typical is very well described by Surtees. He plumps not for Leicestershire or Rutland but for Northamptonshire, near the Huntingdon boundary.

‘If I had under my wing a foreigner who wanted to see the very cream of fox-hunting I would place him on the top of the little ravine that runs up Waterloo Gorse in the Harborough country. . . . What a view it is! . . . grass, grass, grass, right away for miles and miles into the heart of Leicestershire! And such enclosures! Then . . . what can be finer than the line across the Kelmarsh Vale on to Naseby Field or to the east by Artingworth and over that magnificent vale? In fact, let him go where he will, barring the forest, perhaps, and he would have as fine a country before him as a man need wish to see.’

He goes on to praise Waterloo Gorse as the finest cover in the world, and from that grows lyrical on the Lilbourne country, which he calls 'tremendous', an astonishing word, except in a hunting reference, for this quiet country. There are some of the stiffest, highest fences, with some of the widest drains in the whole of Northamptonshire, or perhaps in the whole of England. In fact, I never rightly appreciated a bullfinch till I cast my eyes over these. The bullfinch is a hedge, usually white or blackthorn, that has grown high and tree-like, often above the once layered line. You must jump through it and your face runs the greatest danger.

Hunting literature is largely bound with the Midlands. Whyte-Melville is the historian of Market Harborough. Beckford, whose *Thoughts on Hunting* is the chief classic, dealt with most of the famous Midland packs. 'Nimrod', whose name was Apperley, opens what is perhaps the best-known of all descriptions of hunting with an account of the Quorn country and the most famous of all Masters of Foxhounds, the breezy and emphatic Osbaldeston. He was a Yorkshireman, but could not keep away from the Shires, where he had no fewer than three kennels, at Brixworth, Dunchurch, and Brigstock.

'Let us suppose ourselves' (writes 'Nimrod') 'to have been at Ashley Pasture in the Quorn country with Mr. Osbaldeston's hounds in the year 1826, when that pack was at the height of its well-deserved celebrity. Let us also indulge ourselves with a fine morning in the first week of February, and at least two hundred well-mounted men at the cover's side. Time being called, say a quarter past eleven—nearly our great-grandfathers' dinner hour—the hounds

approach the furze-brake, or gorse as it is called in that region. . . .’

And later in the famous essay:

‘The line of scent lies across a good grass ground (as a field is called in Leicestershire) somewhat on the ascent; abounding in anthills or hillocks, peculiar to old grazing ground and thrown up by the plough some hundred years since into rather high ridges with deep, holding furrows between each. The hedge at the top is impracticable—Meltonice “a stopper”; nothing for it but a gate leading into a deep green lane, high and strong, with deep slippery ground on each side of it. “Now for the timber-jumper,” cries Osbaldeston, pleased to find himself on Ashton. . . .’

‘Nimrod’ gives a very true and clear picture of the nature of the country, and is peculiarly the historian of the hedgerow, as thus:

‘It is a newly plashed hedge, abounding in strong growers, as they are called, and a yawning ditch on the far side; but, as is peculiar in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, a considerable portion of the blackthorn, left uncut, leans outwards from the hedge somewhat about breast high.’

These pictures of a hundred years ago are not very different from to-day’s scene and scenery. Even then the hunt had some trouble to raise money enough. Osbaldeston, much the most notable of all Masters of Foxhounds, had finally to surrender the pack in 1834, just a hundred years from my ‘to-day’. It was written:

‘The squires have the money and the graziers have

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

not, so the hounds stand a bad chance if the latter do not give them a lift; and before Mr. Osbaldeston relinquished the country the subscriptions had dwindled below the level of a second-rate provincial.'

It is worth noting that the hunting community in the Shires referred to most visitors as provincials. The finances were always very closely bound up with the social and indeed the farming life of the country.

Hunting as we know it, began in the early eighteenth century. The start of the Belvoir is a standard example of how the beginning was made. In 1730 articles of agreement were drawn up. In them, as a preliminary, John, Duke of Rutland, George, Earl of Cardigan, Baptist, Earl of Gainsborough, John, Lord Gower, and Scrope, Lord How, agreed annually and by two instalments to place each £150 in the hands of Alderman Child of Temple Bar; and if this was not enough the five pledged themselves to make good the deficit at the end of the year. Some of the details are surprising. The hounds were to be as many as nineteen (a very small minimum) and not to be more than twenty inches high.

Since that day prices have both risen and fallen. By way of illustration here is the epitomized history of a property alongside Gidding Gorse, whose praises all riders to the Fitzwilliam hounds have sung. It was bought for £22 an acre in 1777 by a neighbouring landowner. The neighbourhood is sufficiently well known in literature, for nearby was the home of Nicholas Ferrar and his community. By the chapel on the hill is the grave of Mary Collett, whom J. H. Shorthouse made famous in *John Inglesant*. Down the southern slope of the farms two fine avenues led to the crossing of the

little brook; and rectilineal hollows that were once fish-ponds indicate how populous the district was before the Reformation, and how various the forms of food production. Let this older history of a prosperous era look after itself; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, and more recent annals suffice for the contrast.

After the purchase of the adjacent farms in 1777, a small fortune was spent in the building of cottages, out-buildings, and a fuller equipment for the farm-house. The excellence and cost are announced by the present solidity of the buildings. These farms (and many others near them) suffered severely in the depression of the early 'eighties and the returns began to reach vanishing point. The revival was slow, and the better part of the land, with its cottages and buildings included, was sold in 1915 for no more than £12 an acre. In 1930 the land and buildings were again sold at a loss, this time at the rate of £4 10s. an acre. It would be a generous estimate to conclude that the money represents half the value of the buildings. To estimate the value of the land itself, we need a new formula: 0 minus  $x$ , or nothing minus a large but unknown sum.

Let no one imagine that the land is poor in itself. It is good land. People once boasted that you could not want better 'bean and wheat land'. The grass is good and rich. Heavy crops are still grown on the few arable acres left. The oak trees of one side of the old avenue are fine and large. Even fruit trees flourish. The railway is remote, six miles away; but the roads are good. The Great North Road itself is only three miles away. Electric cables cross the slope, and the total distance from London, by far the greatest market in the world, is sixty-five miles. The fields can produce in excellent

quality and without undue labour or cost the foods that come to London from 12,000 miles away, as well as from nearer Europe; it is good dairy country, good poultry country, good wheat and bean country, and moderately good fruit country.

The hunts still flourish, and some of the community of hunting-people are still racy of the soil and of rural life. The biggest social difference perhaps is in the connection of Church and hunt. 'The Flying Parson', whose identity and life have recently been discovered and published by Major Guy Paget in a most racy chronicle, was typical of though more notorious than his fellows. Even the foxes seemed to have a fond relation to the Churches in the Shires. One famous kill was in the church at Broughton Astley near Leicester, where a tired fox took refuge one Friday just as the congregation were beginning to assemble.

'Nimrod', who was careful about his anonymity, was taken to be a parson by one group of contemporary critics, largely on the evidence of one of his more questionable jests. He had written in an account of the digging out of a fox from his earth that it was luckily timed, for it reminded the parson that he had a funeral to take which would else have been forgotten.

A very fine character with whom the writer of this had some acquaintance was sometimes known in his district as the last of the 'Squarsons', a portmanteau word belonging especially to Middle England. He was being chaffed one day on the cut of his coat, which was in truth like no other coat in heaven or on earth, and he explained its origin and purpose. 'You see,' he said, 'I had to have a coat that would serve for the hunt on Friday, for Peterborough market on Saturday, and for

Hamerton Church on Sunday.' So closely allied in his person, as in the life of the community were farm, church, and hunt. He was excellent in all these pursuits, and deserves fame as the promoter of a system of village cow-pastures, so called, by which the villagers were enabled to keep a cow by sharing a part of the glebe in common, one piece for hay, one as grazing paddock. He made a notable discovery or two. One was the disclosing of a Decorated font thrown into the pond of one of his favourite farms by Cromwellian iconoclasts. Earlier than this the hunting parsons were perhaps better in the field than in the pulpit, better as followers of the hounds than as shepherds of their flock, though not many of them went quite so far as Parson Storey of Lockington, who staged a cock-fight in his church with the Marquis of Hastings. This was something of a scandal even at that date in that district; but the county was full of characters, of men of individuality as strong as their native soil and rocks, of their clay and their granite.

Osbaldeston was not content only with hunting. After the fashion of men of his kidney and times he was continually backing himself to some feat. Among his notorious doings were a serious duel with Lord George Bentinck and the riding of 200 miles in ten hours. The biographers have missed their opportunities. Perhaps the most extreme of all the type, though he was more famous as a steeplechaser than a hunter, and belonged to more northern and more westerly counties, was John Mytton—'Wild as a hawk, kind as a Father Christmas.' As a symptom of the physical fitness that so often accompanied these riding fanatics, it was said of him that he had no need to possess a handkerchief! 'Nimrod' wrote his life; but the genius that he showed in describing a



run of the hounds with the 'snobs' and 'provincials' and true Meltonians who followed them deserted him in the biography. Yet the picture remains and is typical of the Shires as of no other place, though doubtless their qualities spread into Wiltshire and Dorsetshire, and, through Osbaldeston, owed something to the Yorkshire Fells. His physical fitness excused and caused a good many of Mytton's extravagances, from a post-prandial moonlight steeplechase—very dear to the makers of coloured prints—to the taking of a fence with a hackney and a wheeled carriage. It must be confessed that the bottle, or many bottles, had also no little influence. In Whyte-Melville's tales of Market Harborough, which are about half and half local anecdote and straight fiction, the consumption of claret, bottle after bottle, is more than gargantuan; and diners so lurid would as soon drive their hackneys across country on the way home as ride their hunters over it the next morning.

Two of the great changes since those days are the multiplication of ladies in the hunting-field, for the game is newer to them than is generally allowed. They have become even Masters—a development that would have shocked Osbaldeston—and very good Masters too, witness the Hertfordshire and Essex hunts since the war. The second change is much less welcome. Wire began to appear, very much at the same time as woman, in the hunting-field, though perhaps a little later, and presently took to itself barbs. The glory of England is the hedgerow, especially in the Midlands. From the day when first commons and common fields were enclosed quick hedges were planted. The slips were cut from the thorn trees that had always dotted the country and made brakes. Did not Milton's shepherd count his sheep

## MIDDLE ENGLAND

beneath them, or in the corner of one of the early hedge-rows, and Milton was a Buckinghamshire man:

Every shepherd tells his tale  
Under the hawthorn in the dale.

These quicks set beside ditches, by reputation a yard deep, four feet across, and a foot at the bottom, grew like weeds and made the glorious paddock and field that patterned the green mosaic that is the surface of England. The appearance of wire was revolutionary. It made bad hedgekeeping possible; and there was always the fear that it might be preferred before the hedge and cut up the shires into rectangles of an Australian pattern. It was particularly odious in counties where hunting was one of the chief industries, as the socialist complained. It was either visible and ugly or invisible and dangerous. Many serious accidents occurred and still occur; but farmers and landowners began to co-operate in the putting up of boards, coloured red for danger, as a warning against the hidden strand; and 'ware wire' was a call that soon spread. I have known the owner of a grass glebe to receive a half-petulant, half-angry letter from the M.F.H. in protest against wire fences set up to divide the village cow-pastures, with barbs on them; it is a grim and punishing material, converting defence into offence. Happily it has spread less widely than was feared in most of the more typical hunting shires. The hedges survive, even to bullfinches, and the hunts survive in spite both of wire and depression.

The farmers themselves still hunt, and often enough—perhaps especially in Hertfordshire—they are accompanied in the field by their wives and daughters. Indeed, the pony clubs have brought new vitality, and the

children, even the little girls, evince some of the robust vigour of the Assheton Smiths and the Flying Parson. It is a recent experience that a girl aged twelve, appointed Master for the Day at a children's meet, threw her pony across the path of a small boy riding too near the hounds (an act peculiarly abhorred by Osbaldeston) and said, in the best idiom of the hunt, 'Where the —— are you going, you d——d little tadpole.' That objurgation is in direct apostolic succession to the traditional masters of the Pytchley and the Quorn.

The English counties are curiously individual. They might each advertise themselves by some special attribute. Charles Lamb has a charming essay on 'Hearty, Homely Hertfordshire', and it well describes that gently undulating county with its slow, quiet rivers, including the Lea 'that oft doth lose its way', its little woods, its snug commons and villages and not least its succession of glorious but unpretentious country houses—this *Hoo* and that *End* and the other *Bury*. Was not Hatfield House itself, with its wild and wonderful park and most antique oaks, one of the first real country houses to be built without fortification? Many of the Home Counties are counties, not shires at all, but none has better right to the word *home* than this 'hearty, homely' place of Lamb's choice.

Buckinghamshire, the chief home of that most English tree, the beech, has lost some of its rural charm; but the Penn country, to quote one area of it, has been the subject of one of the most beautiful of the new survey books; and the authors brought out among other things the surprising antiquity of the villages. The country was very populous indeed in the days of Elizabeth, and

these old villages are as memorable for their history as the church of which Gray wrote his elegy, or as the farm where Waller had his being, or as the special homes of the Friends from whom Penn went forth to found Pennsylvania.

We are apt to think of Leicestershire, especially of the hunt, as a rather flat, open county of grass fields separated by hedges and so-called drains; but it is as various as its varied geology, and the surface answers to the underlying limestone, red sandstone, coal, or granite or what not. Charnwood Forest is a region of great variety of level as well as of timber, and will in the future, thanks to recent efforts, be more carefully preserved and yet more widely accessible. Charnwood itself rises to rather less than 1,000 feet, and little they know of Leicestershire who have only galloped their thoroughbreds on the pastures of the graziers and among the cattle and Leicester sheep that are, after all, the chief denizens.

Charnwood has not the romance of Sherwood Forest with which the whole literary world is familiar, though modern critics deny that Robin Hood ever existed to rob the Sheriff of Nottinghamshire. That is long ago, if ever it happened; but romance does not die. The Prince of Wales, who has been described as the most romantic Prince since Prince Charlie, is one of those who has discovered the attractions of the county, and his Lenton farm begins to make a mark in the history of our agriculture. Was his first appreciation of the county due to his pleasure in hunting?

No county perhaps has more violent contrasts than Warwickshire. Stratford on Avon is both the geographic and spiritual centre of England. The Forest of Arden has a sound delicious in the ears of the world, and as I have

said the view over the country round about is invincibly English. But why are the wheat-fields more freely punished by sparrows than any other harvest fields in Britain? The reason is that the great and also most English industrial town of Birmingham sends out its hosts of birds on their yearly migration to the harvest, to bear witness to the sometimes forgotten truth that the town is dependent upon the country, and the field necessary for the factory's well-being.

Most of the forests of England are rather open common than wood: the deer forest, the New Forest, the Forests of Arden, Charnwood, Dean, and not least Sherwood, though this last has as fine oaks as Hatfield or the edge of old Windsor Forest at Aldermaston in Berkshire. In relation to the woods in it Northampton is wonderfully well treed; and perhaps no shire in England is more ignorantly undervalued by all the community that does not hunt. It is far from being the dull plain of its reputation. Rather surprisingly, for no ground rises as high as 700 feet, it is the watershed of Middle England and the source of several of our most famous rivers: the Ouse and Welland and Nene; and above all the Avon. It includes wold and fen and pleasant undulations and a good soil. Like Notts, it has a very low rainfall, and grain crops are harvested, though not even farmers appreciate the truth, with less loss from rain and often earlier in the year than in any districts of its approximate latitude. If anyone wishes to see a characteristic model of our various island he might do worse than search out the sources of the Ouse and the Avon flowing east and west from the low, well-treed ridge of Northampton.



59 A RUTLAND VILLAGE: UPPER HAMBLETON



60 THE ALNE AT HAMPTON-IN-ARDEN, WARWICKSHIRE



61 THE APPROACH TO CHIPPING CAMPDEN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Charles Bradley Ford

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THE  
COTSWOLD COUNTRY  
AND THE WEST MIDLAND VALES

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OXFORD is the gateway to the Cotswolds; but that city of domes and spires, workshops and markets, quadrangles and gardens, belongs to a larger world than can well be brought under survey in this brief section. One way to the hill country lies across the plain to Witney, where gabled stone houses of all ages, with weathered stone-slate roofs, show that we have entered the Cotswold building zone, as, on leaving the town, a sharp rise in gradient marks the first foothills. Now the road begins to climb with some persistence above the bright little valley of the Windrush, and the country changes its aspect from a chequer-work of elm-hedged fields to an expanse of rolling upland, patterned by dry stone walls and occasionally darkened by the mass of a beech wood. There are few villages to be seen; only now and then in the distance comes a hamlet caught in a fold of the hills—grey



roofs clustered about a spare church; for the true 'bluestone' road of the Cotswolds keeps to the ridges, only sending out from time to time a switchback feeler to connect with the world of men. From 600 feet we take the shallow dip through Northleach, cutting across the line of the old Fosse Way that carried the legions from Lincoln to Cirencester and beyond; and from thence it is a steady climb to the lonely summit of the wold country, where the small Puesdown Inn, at 800 feet, stands four-square against the force of the westerly gales. This is the crest of the road and a useful tactical centre from which to begin our survey. Before we make the winding descent into Cheltenham it will be well to pause here and take some stock of the nature and settlement of our surroundings.

Cotswold proper forms a solid limestone barrier to the orchards and pastures of the Western Midlands, conveniently bisected by the road we have just traversed into two broad divisions of the North Cotswolds and the South. The hills extend about sixty miles, from the Wiltshire Avon by Bath in the south-west to the Warwickshire Avon by Evesham in the north-east, reaching to a depth of some twenty-five miles; but the great oolite belt of which they form a part continues at a lower level through the wold country of Edge Hill to the 'dumpling hills' of Northamptonshire, sinking at last beneath the soft fen soil beyond the undulations of Rutland. While Cotswold only twice touches the 1,000-foot level, at Cleeve Hill and Broadway Tower, its escarpment, overlooking the Vales of Severn and Avon, maintains a fairly consistent seven to nine hundred feet, though the wolds beyond Edge Hill seldom average more than 500.

Such are the geographical dry bones of this country;

## THE COTSWOLD COUNTRY

the scenery that clothes them has an individual character that had impressed itself on men's minds before Shakespeare wrote of its 'high wild hills' or Drayton praised its pastures. Its *ethos* is a less tangible but very pervasive quality, instinct in its natives and casting a quick spell on the outsider who comes to settle on these wolds—as outsiders are continuing to settle in the converted halls and cottages of their older stock. This would be hard to analyse with any measure of satisfaction, but it must have at least some connection with the sense of contrast in the elements that go to produce the Cotswold picture: the spacious beauty of the wold heaving buff-green into the distance, its thin fringes of beech clear-cut against a crowded sky, and the seclusion of the valley, with its pollarded willows and clear brook threading a string of villages in the tawny local stone, built with a careful craftsmanship and sense of style that are the peculiar achievement of the district.

It is difficult nowadays to visualize this landscape before the Agrarian Revolution of the sixteenth century had imposed its patterning of stone walls. These, sweeping the brow of the wold or wriggling with the valley lane, have their own beauty, whether coloured the fawn of fresh-quarried rock or weathered to an ashen grey. In a sense their coming put a period to the Cotswold golden age, that saw the wold as a vast open grazing, peopled by flocks of tough little sheep that seemed half smothered beneath the abundance of their short, white fleeces. Drayton wrote:

. . . The sheep our *Wold* doth breed  
(The simplest though it seeme) shall our description need,  
And shepherd-like, the Muse thus of that kind doth speak.  
No browne, nor sullyed black the face or legs doth streak

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

Like those of Moreland, Cank, or of the Cambrian Hills  
That lightly laden are; but Cotswold wisely fills  
Her with the whitest kind; whose browes so woolly be  
As men in her fair sheepe no emptiness shall see.  
The staple deep and thick, through, to the very graine  
Most strongly keepeth out the violentest rain. . . .

It was this productive beast, whose breed has suffered a decline, that brought wealth and prosperity to the Cotswold valleys. It is a commonplace that the economic history of the English Middle Ages can be summarized in the word Wool; to wool we owe the development of towns and the building of many of our finest later churches; wool sent our soldier kings adventuring into France and at home produced a first burgess aristocracy that has almost its parallel at the present day. Up to the fifteenth century, wool and more wool was needed for the mills of Flanders, the hub of European textile activity, and the Cotswold product could compare with any in quality. The first wealth came to the staplers, whose pack-trains wound their way across the shaggy face of England from Campden, Northleach, Cirencester, and other centres, loaded with material for the Norfolk ports, or, later, the Staple at Calais. Wool halls were built in the towns for the storage and distribution of the product; mansions arose for the staplers, cottages for their employees, and a regional architecture was born. Merchants of the status of William Grevel, who died in 1401, the progenitor of a long line of Earls of Warwick, had trade connections extending over half Europe. Grevel ruled at Chipping Campden, and Mr. Evans<sup>1</sup> has drawn a graphic picture of the appearance of that still unique little town in the bustle of its shearing-time activity:

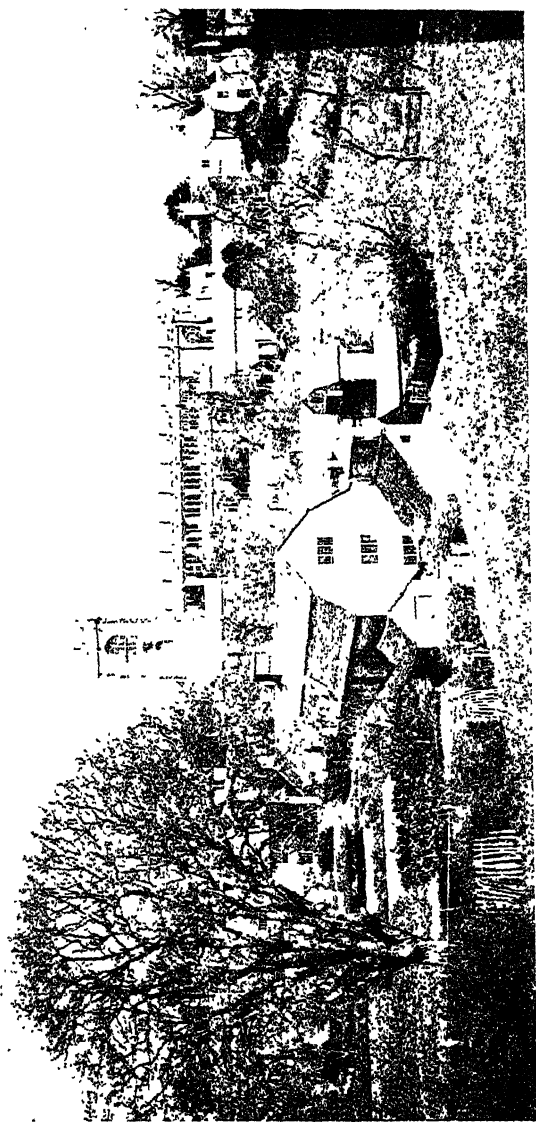
*Highways and Byways in Oxford and the Cotswolds.*



62 ROUNDING UP SHEEP ON A COTSWOLD HILLSIDE



63 A COTSWOLD VALLEY: THE COLN, NEAR COLN ROGERS,  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE



64 A FORMER WOOL MARKET OF THE COTSWOLDS: WINCHCOMBE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

## THE COTSWOLD COUNTRY

'Droves of pack-horses laden with wool consigned to Grevel and other merchants, would be seen slowly filing through the town to the Woolstaplers' Hall, a fourteenth-century building still standing, with its adjacent warehouses. Here the wool would be sorted and made up into bales of the orthodox size called sarplers or pokes, while samples would be passed from hand to hand to be criticized and appraised by the assembled merchants: bids would follow and a considerable quantity would change owners, as corn does nowadays in a modern corn exchange.'

With the consolidation of this great industry by Edward III, the foundations were laid for a native manufacture of cloths and woollens that brought a decline in the brisk business of the Cotswold townlets. The centres of activity inevitably shifted to places more liberally supplied with the water-power essential for milling, and the wold towns had to resign themselves to the spectacle of industry budding anew along the streams of the Stroudwater valleys. Nevertheless, the older centres were not entirely superseded, and we can still read of the state kept by such a family as the Tames, who milled at Cirencester and grazed vast flocks at Fairford on the lands adjoining their mansion, where Henry VIII was not ashamed to visit them. It was only Elizabeth's decree forbidding the export of raw wool in any shape or form that gave their death-warrant to the uplands, and by Stuart times Cirencester, Campden, Northleach had already shrunk into something of the sweet picturesque insignificance that is theirs to-day.

The later history of the wolds is one of peaceful agrarian application, only disturbed by the stormy

interlude of the Civil War. Cotswold is so essentially a passage country that it is not surprising that it should have been the scene of frequent marchings and skirmishes, though these left little mark on the land save here and there, at Compton Wynyates, for instance, where the moated house of the Comptons survived while the church was smashed to pieces, and at Campden, where the large and splendid house built by Sir Baptist Hicks, an Elizabethan merchant-usurer who had taken the diminished little town under his wing, was insensately fired by the Royalists. Edge Hill, the first considerable battle, took place beneath the northern escarpment, while almost the last encounter was fought out in the uplands by Stow, where old Lord Astley, with 3,000 men, was surrounded in a final attempt to break through to the King at Oxford, and, 'being taken Captive, wearied in this fight (for old ages silver haire had quite covered over his head and beard) the Souldiers brought him a Drum to sit and rest himselfe upon, who being sate, he said (as was most credibly enformed) unto our Souldiers: Gentlemen, yee may now sit downe & play, for you have done all your worke, if you fall not out among yourselves.' Admirably sensible advice on the conclusion of some four years of bitter civil conflict!

The only further disturbance to the 'calm and deep peace on these high wolds' was the remarkable tobacco riots of the later seventeenth century. Certainly around Winchcombe, and possibly in other parts of Cotswold, a promising tobacco-growing industry had been fostered, so promising, indeed, that the American colonists began to fear for their markets and complained to the King, Charles II, who undertook to suppress it. But the Cotswold growers were not easily daunted. In the face

of Acts of Parliament and repeated proclamations they continued to cultivate their crops, until in the end it was necessary to send down the Life Guards from London, in the face of clamorous local opposition, to tear the tobacco up by the roots and lay the fields waste. A less controversial innovation of soon after was the root-crop, still cultivated in large quantities over the uplands. The introduction of the turnip marked the beginning of the decline of the older breed of wool-producing sheep. Early in the eighteenth century Lord Bathurst, in his retreat at Cirencester, had crossed the latter with a Leicester, and the result was an altogether larger animal of long-fleeced type, with a higher value to the butcher than to the stapler. This breed is still to be seen in its thousands sprinkled over the Cotswold hillsides, cropping their short, sweet grass; and if it is no longer the golden talisman that was its predecessor, it furnishes the livelihood of a stout race of Cotswold graziers and shepherds, whose stone farms and cottages have become an integral part of the landscape of valley and wold.

The obstinate individuality of this race is still best preserved in its architecture, that has remained a consistent expression of local materials and needs. The 'Cotswold style' seems to have had its birth towards the close of the fourteenth century; certainly by the fifteenth it had reached a high degree of maturity in buildings such as the Grevel house at Chipping Campden and Icomb Manor, which were well ahead of their time in domestic suitability. Eliminate their touches of purely medieval detail and you have the unmistakable Cotswold product of the next two centuries, with its solid dignity of gable and chimney, stone-mullioned windows grouped in tiers beneath molded dripstones, and an occasional



projecting bay or oriel. The houses, like the churches, and even the barns, were roofed with the stone slates that weather so exquisitely; there is an architecture awaiting documentation in the farm buildings alone. Even groups of labourers' cottages, such as little Arlington Row at Bibury, now acquired for the nation, seem to breathe something of the same distinction, though it is the smaller manor-house that is the supreme Cotswold product. The examples of this at Owlpen, Upper Swell, Upper Slaughter, Snowhill, and a dozen more are certainly worthy of all the high praise bestowed upon them; they are, as they look, the dignified expression of pride in local prosperity and achievement. After the sixteenth century, it is true, the woldsmen were quick to seize upon the properties of the new classic repertoire for their doorways and details, but the body of the work long continued on traditional lines, and it is a remarkable commentary that so thoroughly typical a building as Tudor House at Broadway is practically contemporary with the Restoration. Even the eighteenth-century buildings, though clothed in an orthodox classical coat, maintained something of the old stylistic independence. Cirencester, Painswick, Burford, and other towns are full of later houses quite delightful in their adaptation of the Renaissance method to Cotswold needs, while mansions such as Lower Lypiatt, Medford House, and, on a grander scale, Barnsley Park, can rank among the most decorous productions of the Georgian age.

A word must also be said of the churches. It is remarkable how many of these remain the primitive little structures that were raised almost 1,000 years ago when the Cotswold manors were first parcelled out among the Norman lords. Though on the outside some of them

are now rather nondescript in appearance, and might well belong to any medieval epoch, several can reveal perfect smaller Norman interiors hardly touched by the restorer, as is the case at Elkstone and Hampnett. The beginnings of prosperity in the thirteenth century are reflected in an Early English group as typical as any in the country of the smaller village churches of that age; North Cerney and the Duntisbournes are particularly attractive, with their saddleback towers. But the glory of the district is its later 'wool' churches that, collectively, remain as grand a memorial to the munificence of their merchant donors as to the genius of the masons who evolved such splendours from the resources of the local stone. Fabrics such as the Cirencester, Northleach, Winchcombe, Fairford, and Campden churches can rank with any in the country in their beauty of craftsmanship. No visitor to Cotswold can afford to miss them, for they represent more than the achievement of a single favoured district. They are one of the brightest constellations of our architectural firmament.

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It is time to return to our base at Puesdown to begin our exploration of the South Cotswolds. Only a mile or two from the inn are the headwaters of perhaps the loveliest of Cotswold streams, the Coln, which winds along a green floor of water-meads, among sudden little bluffs beneath which the villages are often sheltered. At the head of the valley stands one of the most attractive of these, Sevenhampton, where a gabled manor-house adjoins a small grey church. Beyond the beech woods of Chedworth, hiding the remains of a Roman villa, are the glades of Stowell Park, with its delicious rangers

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

house; then Coln St. Denis, Calcot, Coln Rogers, Ablington, and Bibury follow like pretty beads on a string. Bibury is deservedly the most popular of Cotswold hamlets; it leaves a memory of grey roofs and bright cottage gardens, boys on the bridge by the little Swan Inn throwing pebbles at the fat trout that slip by stealthily among the reeds. Coln St. Aldwyn follows, and Quennington, and the rich tower of Fairford Church comes into view like a beacon overlooking the broad meadows of the Thames Valley.

An almost parallel stream to southward, the Churn, rises in the high, broken country around Birdlip and flows in a pretty valley through Colesbourne and North Cerney, fed by tributary brooks that connect another group of villages that includes the two Duntisbournes and Bagendon, among its old trees. We are now close on the fringes of Cirencester Park, a beautiful stretch of downland reclaimed and planted by the first Lord Bathurst:

Whose rising forests, not for pride or show,  
But future buildings, future navies grow;  
Let his plantations stretch from down to down,  
First shade and country, and then noise and town. . . .

Thus Pope, who must have watched over the infancy of many of these oaks and beeches, for he was more than once a visitor to the great house that Bathurst had built for himself at Cirencester in which to pass the pleasant, uneventful years of his self-imposed exile. The mansion itself almost abuts on the town, from which it is screened by a high wall and yew hedge; but it is doubtful whether the 'noise' has much increased since Pope's day, for, in spite of its eight thousand or so inhabitants, Cirencester

## THE COTSWOLD COUNTRY

remains a peaceful little town of old grey streets folded about a broad market place, where a remarkable variety of buses may now usually be seen parking, from the bright new juggernaut of the Gloucester road to the ramshackle potterer about the upland lanes. This market, with its inns and good country shops, is dominated by the stately tower of the church, half screened by the singular south porch of three storeys, which is Cirencester's glory. Built by a local 'lady bountiful' early in the sixteenth century, its uses have been various, including a lodging for chantry priests, a headquarters for the town gilds, a courthouse for the quarter sessions, and a town hall. It has survived them all, and remains very much the 'noble frontispiece' enjoined in the original grant.

Stroud is perhaps the busiest market of the Cotswolds; it is also a centre for some of the best scenery. From the outskirts of the town rises the whale-backed hump of Rodborough Common, a high, open expanse of downland that in clear weather commands views over the steely Severn to the shaggy hills of Dean and the distant mountain line of Wales beyond. The town stands at the entrance to the long, steep Stroudwater Valley, in which habitation seems almost continuous, the houses terraced on the hillsides while the railway and canal run in company along the floor, by big textile mills now largely put to other uses, including some really dignified eighteenth-century ranges. Over the hills to the south, Nailsworth is the hub of another group of wooded gorges—a fine sight in autumn when the hill-sides are burnished with a spectrum of coppery tints.

While Cotswold thrusts down limestone feelers as far as Bath, the southerly ridges are a far less formidable

barrier than those to northward—one seldom more than five or six miles deep. The last tracts of wold are decorated by the wooded parks of some stately houses—Dyrham, for instance, and Badminton—and the ridge roads give views eastward over the woods and fields of Wiltshire (where the stone building of Cotswold extends into the verdant pocket of Castle Combe), and westward over green flats to the widening Severn. But the best escarpment views of the southerly wolds are around Birdlip to northward, where the Ermine Way plunges from nearly 1,000 feet through wood and wold to the plain, and the crest commands the chequered vale from the tower of Gloucester in the south to the tower of Worcester in the north, with the clear-cut profile of the Malverns and the wavering outline of the Shropshire hills beyond.

Cheltenham lies in a saucer of plain with the hills curving around it, and combines the amenities of a haven for the retired and educational centre for the young of both sexes, with a flavour of faded Regency refinement that is very much its own. Perhaps the stucco villas and terraces of John Papworth, its architect, ‘Author of the Treatise on Dry Rot’, have never quite achieved the social distinction for which they were intended; but in their garb of lemon plaster flounced with summer green, with the open wold an easy walk from their front doors, they are pleasant places in which to spend the spring or autumn of a life. But let us not linger among the darting bicycles of these streets, but leave the town by way of Prestbury, and there take the lane that charges straight up the formidable brow of Cleeve Hill to obtain from its summit perhaps the broadest view that Cotswold can offer.

## THE COTSWOLD COUNTRY

Over this bluff lies Winchcombe in another saucer, a rather meagre little town with good inns and a vast church, from our viewpoint grouping prettily among its trees. From here the North Cotswold escarpment stretches before us to Meon Hill, abrupt and thickly wooded, sheltering a string of charmingly typical villages: Stanway and Stanton with their manor-houses, Buckland, Willersey, the Subedges, and, in the midst, Broadway. Poor Broadway, with its home handicrafts and Americans! If its latter-day sophistication is slightly repellent, nothing can really detract from the beauty of its situation or the charm of its old houses. Here we strike the Worcester-London road and climb with it to the bald summit of Broadway Hill to obtain one of the grandest views in England, over the tree-sprinkled Vale of Evesham, broken by the low humps of Bredon and Dumbleton and backed by dusky western ridges. While here we may well stop for a drink at the little Fish Inn, for its situation is unrivalled and its neat classic exterior adorable, before pushing on through the wilds of Five Mile Drive to the cross-road that marks the parting of the ways to Moreton-in-the-Marsh and Stow-on-the-Wold.

Stow might be described as the Clapham Junction of the Cotswolds, for it is the meeting-place of many roads—a fact possibly explained by the all-England popularity of its medieval fair. From here we may follow lanes to such secluded villages as Upper Swell and Lower Slaughter, Wyck Rissington, Naunton, and lovely Bourton-on-the-Water, with its green margins and clear stream spanned by toy bridges—in contrast to its sister, Bourton-on-the-Hill, which clings tenaciously to the uplands. Our present Bourton is threaded by the

infant Windrush, and it is a pleasant expedition to follow its modest valley down to Burford, where one of the loveliest streets in England sweeps the brow of the wold and drops to a river bordered by classic houses and fragrant gardens. Close by, at Widford, in a little church only used in summer, you may roll back the chancel carpet and find the green tessellations of a Roman villa pavement.

From Burford we might take a ridge lane northward to survey the parallel Evenlode Valley, which carries the railway in a flowing S from Woodstock, past the woodland bluffs of Wychwood Forest, to Moreton—while the main road takes an upland course by way of Chipping Norton, terraced on its hillside.

Chipping Campden lies in a fold of the northernmost spur of Cotswold, and has a quiet beauty that belongs to few places. Its sights are eloquent of the grave mercantile dignity of its great days: the stately market hall with its open arcades and gabled windows; the group of almshouses with the church tower beyond; Grevel's mansion, with its rich projecting bays; the broad sheep market; and the individual beauty of a hundred houses. Should you stop there you will hear much of its famous games, inaugurated by Robert Dover in the reign of James I and discontinued after 1852, when they had sunk to a meeting for all the rabble of Birmingham. You may also, if you are lucky, come in for the Christmas mumming, still a vociferous annual occasion; and you will certainly hear a good deal of chatter about the arts and crafts over tea and home-made cakes in more than one orange and black parlour. But for all its spice of sophistication, Campden is a delicious little place with an 'old world' air that is for once authentic—quite a

different air to that breathed by Broadway, sitting demurely on the edge of the plain below.

Over the valley to northward lies the last considerable mass of Cotswold, a bare and nameless down sheltering the two pretty villages of Hidcote Bartrim and Hidcote Boyce, and the deserted Palladian mansion of Foxcote. Here, on the Ilmington road, you may meet a signpost that directs you 'to the top of the world'; and when you reach that eminence you will be rewarded by a view which, in its sweep and power, is scarcely matched in England. Far into the distance stretches the Avon Vale. In the western foreground is the wrinkled cone of Meon Hill, the Cotswold outpost, shaggy with scattered woods, while to the east, across the verdant 'Red Horse Vale' of the Stour, is the limestone ridge of Edge Hill, shading into the smoother undulations of Northamptonshire.

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Descending from the heights, it is something of a surprise to find that the green chequer-work of the Vale—that from above seemed endlessly level—is in reality a rolling country of orchard, meadow, and coppice, scattered with half-timber villages and threaded by the courses of two stately rivers. These rivers—first the Avon and then the Severn—connect a string of little towns, each as beautiful in its setting as it is rich in interest and memorable in association; and from the latter aspect at least we could not choose a better point than Stratford from which to start our journey down the Vales.

Stratford's later history is, of course, bound up in its connections with Shakespeare, whose youth and age were passed, as everybody knows, in this still thriving little



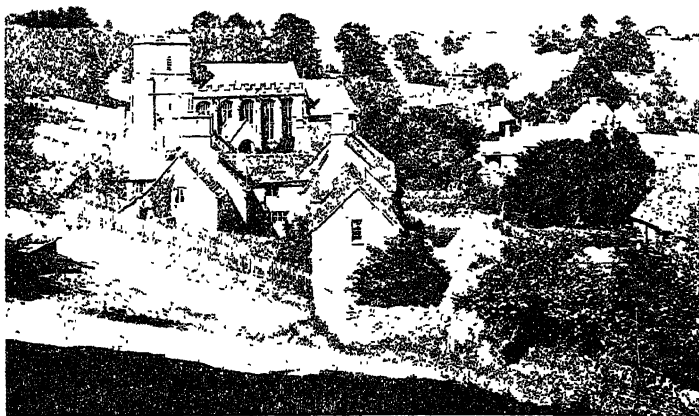
town beside the Avon. You may inspect his birthplace, and Ann Hathaway's reputed cottage, at sixpence a time, and gaze at his monument in the lovely light-filled chancel of the parish church. The Memorial Theatre beside the river, originally the worst building in England, was obliterated by a merciful fire, and has recently been replaced by the present chaste experiment in modernism. But it is possible that Sir Hugh Clopton's bridge of many spans remains the chief adornment hereabouts to Shakespeare's Avon.

Some twelve miles down the river we come to Evesham, the quiet capital of its own abundant Vale, perhaps the most productive fruit-growing district in all England. This country is naturally at its most beautiful in spring, when its orchards are enveloped in a white foam of blossom. Evesham arose around an abbey, of which only the bell-tower survives, with a timbered gateway into the precincts. There are narrow streets of Georgian houses and a broad market-place, and the churchyard is singular in containing two substantial churches. Altogether it is a place to visit, making besides an excellent base from which to explore a countryside rich in interest and beauty. The half-timber villages grouped in a circle around Bredon Hill, though only actually some five or six miles removed from the precise stonework of Cotswold, belong to another England, one of stately parkland and dappled meadow, of timbered gables glimpsed through pale blossom, and broad, placid river reaches. The Combertons, Cropthorne, Elmely Castle, Ashton Underhill, are all delicious of their type, and so are the old manor-houses with which this country is dotted: Woolas, Cleeve Prior, Harvington, and the others.

Pershore is the next Avon town. Here was another



65 THE SEVERN VALLEY FROM THE COTSWOLD RIDGE NEAR NYMPFIELD, GLOUCESTERSHIRE



66 CHEDWORTH IN THE COTSWOLDS, GLOUCESTERSHIRE



67 LOWER SLAUGHTER IN THE COTSWOLDS, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

abbey, of which the quire and one transept survive in the fabric of the parish church, while the houses stand apart, a study in Georgian red brick that recalls the rarified atmosphere of Quality Street. Equally attractive is Tewkesbury, with its timbered inns and ancient streets—and here again an abbey fabric stands aloof as the parish church in the sombre magnificence of its Norman nave and unrivalled Norman west front. Tewkesbury is placed at the meeting of the waters, where Severn and Avon join, and here the Vale sinks to flat water-meads fringed to the east by the Cotswold ridges and to the west by the jagged Malverns, but stretching southward with hardly a hillock as far as Gloucester. . . .

At Gloucester our journey must end, rather among the old trees and houses of the Close than in the crowded streets of the city; best of all, perhaps, in the silence of that loveliest of cathedral churches, whose Norman gloom is transfigured eastward by the radiance of an architectural dawn.

Harry Batsford

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THE  
WELSH BORDERLAND:  
ITS HILLS, VALLEYS, AND  
ROMANCE

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IT is right that every lover of England should cherish his own tract of favourite country; Kipling has written peerlessly of 'Sussex by the Sea', and Mr. Belloc has added his very personal appreciation of its rolling miles of windy Downland. One pleasant writer<sup>1</sup> centres his affection on the gentle attractions of maligned Essex, and my friend Mr. A. G. Street finds England's most characteristic beauty in his own Chalk. No one need question the wisdom of his choice, though I personally cannot help gasping a little at the shock of his characterization of my favourite chalk district of North Hampshire (seen in midwinter) as a bleak and poverty-stricken land. I find myself wondering if Mr. Street's keen farming eye is not a little too analytically severe—even the merest trifle jaundiced! I have introduced foreigners to that district as

<sup>1</sup> Mr. R. A. Beckett, *Romantic Essex*.

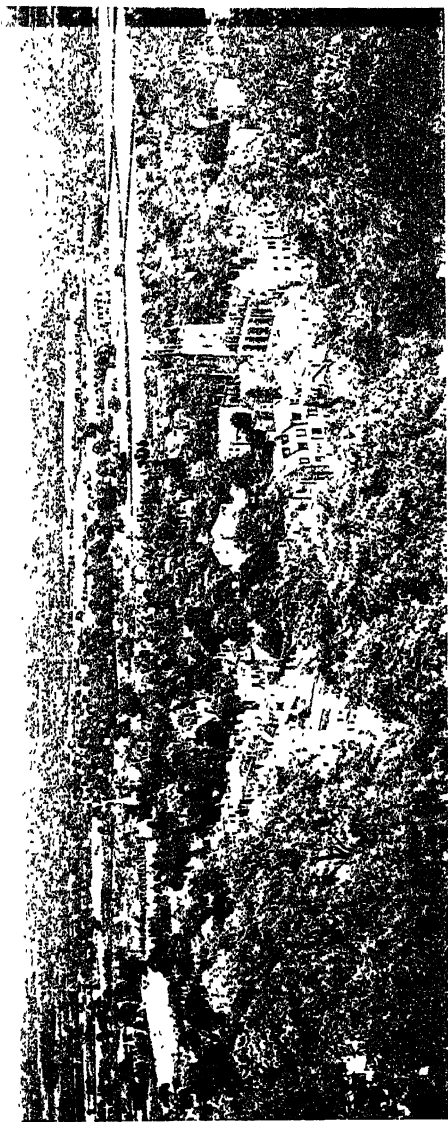
supremely typical of our quiet gracious countryside, and they have been moved to spontaneous admiration. But to me the country of the Welsh Border is possessed of a power and an impressiveness, a beauty and a variety above anything that the rest of England can offer. All the elements of hill and valley, river and dingle, field and woodland mingle in an ensemble of unmatched sweetness and beauty; and its history is steeped in romance. The memory of early struggles is handed down in mighty earth fastnesses—Croft Ambrey, Wapley, Nurdy Bank—and the shells of great castles such as Wigmore, Hopton, Clun and Ludlow. There are mansions of every style and date, from the perfect little embattled Stokesay to the austere classical Attingham; there are ruined abbeys such as Buildwas, Wenlock, Tintern, and Llanthony, and great churches such as Leominster, Ludlow, and Abergavenny. There are towns as adorable as Shrewsbury and Ludlow . . . but one could continue such a list indefinitely. To me the Welsh Border will always be the land of heart's desire, and I am grateful to John Masefield for expressing so memorably in his verses something of the admiring affection of my own heart.

Any account of this tangled complex of hill and valley must demand some measure of co-operation on the reader's part. It has been impossible to include maps in this volume; no map, in any case, except one on a large scale, contoured or coloured, could do proper justice to the configuration of the country—so he must be referred hopefully to Bartholomew or the Ordnance Survey. Briefly, the region lies between the two great estuaries of Dee and Severn, and extends southward from Chester, through the vale country of Cheshire and North Shropshire, the hills and finger-ridges of the south part of that

county, the tumbled plain of Hereford and the uplands of Monmouthshire and Dean. All along the line to westward rise the hills of Wales, massed in close formation, sometimes sending out spurs into English soil, sometimes parting to admit green tongues of farmland in the winding wooded river valleys. Through it from north to south the old Borderline wavers, often with an arbitrary parting of neighbour hills, but still largely following the direction of the turf breastwork built by King Offa of Mercia in the eighth century, which even now can partially be traced.

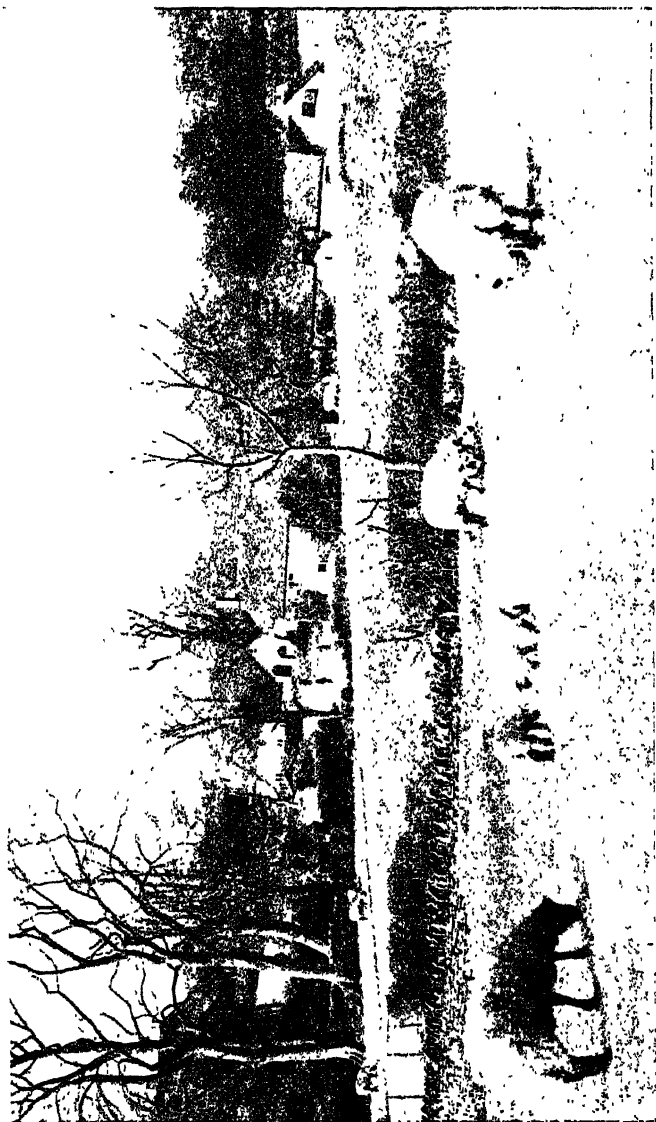
This borderline is a purely historic division, which we will not scruple to ignore; but whether you view the country from the English side or the Welsh, you will be conscious of its transition character, scenically neither completely part of England nor Wales, but admitting and combining elements from both. Similarly with the people; the West Midland burr is sharpened with the quick inflexions of Wales, the small dark Celtic man alternates with the Anglo-Saxon, and the map is peppered with place-names indiscriminately Welsh or English. The Midland half-timber continues to make its appearance well west of the Border; nevertheless it is seldom on the English side that you see one of the clean white farms of Wales, sitting solid on its hillside, the sun sending out a blue gleam from its slate roof.

It is a country that combines such multitudinous beauties that it is surprising that it should remain comparatively little known and explored. This is perhaps due in some degree to the inadequacy of its communications by road or rail, for its hilly lanes are apt to discourage the motorist, and the services on the small branch lines that wander along the valleys, are, with due respect



68 THE PLAIN OF WORCESTERSHIRE FROM THE MALVERNS, LOOKING TO BREDON HILL





69 A HAMLET IN THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS: CLEE ST. MARGARET

to the railway companies, sluggish and intermittent. Even the ubiquitous village bus is a *rara avis*, usually restricted to the weekly market-day: if bucolic simplicity is looked for, there is little in England to match the deep rural peace of these parts. And consider their scenic attractions: a champaign country, patterned with hedgerows, spreads upwards from the floor of the valley to the curving crest of the hill, drops again through steep woods to where a little river curls among its watermeads. Climb to the crest and drink in the beauty of the prospect: to the west a tangle of ridge and hill, darkened with wood masses and occasionally rising to bald moorland summits; beyond, the blue outlines of more hills and more ridges, backed by the faery profiles of Welsh peaks; to the east the Midland plain of England, mile upon mile, stretching into a far haze blurred by the smokes of the Black Country.

But apart from its intrinsic beauty, this country holds a romance that must stir the imagination of anyone who dips even lightly into its history. The immediate comparison is with the Scottish Borders, since both are hill march regions that have provided a setting for centuries of feudal turbulence; but the more northerly has had, at a later period, the immense advantage of perhaps the greatest work of propaganda ever contrived in paper or print for any one district, in the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Even a quick glance over the medieval happenings along the Welsh Border makes one wonder how the great romancer, despite patriotic scruples, came to neglect such material as the crumbling of the Llewellyns, the encroachments of the Lords Marchers, the campaigning of the Edwards and the culminating tragedy of Owen Glendower's adventure.

There is no space here for an account of these events;

to the wayfarer, the husks of ruined castles with which the countryside is studded stand as mute witnesses to centuries of turmoil and violence that only ended with the Civil War. The subjugation of Wales was a task too formidable for direct undertaking even by the Normans, so it came about that the Borderland was parcelled out among the more enterprising of their soldier-adventurers, who were given *carte blanche* to build themselves fastnesses and bring within their rule as much land as could be wrested from a wild, scattered and often incomprehensible native population. It was a process rather similar to that of a man with an axe hacking himself out a clearing in virgin forest, and in most cases the man was brawny and the axe was sharp. The new rulers established themselves by force and existed in watchful defence within the confines of their so-called Lordships Marchers. Nevertheless, it seems that in the majority of cases their rule was fair and equable, so that it was not long before the inevitable mingling of strains began, and peaceful townships and villages grew up beneath the castle walls. Such were Wigmore, Montgomery, Clun, Hay and a dozen more—quiet little places nowadays that seem to belong to their past, half asleep in the shadow of their castle crags. To the fertile valleys also came the monks to found abbeys that grew and prospered, to melt away after the Reformation, leaving little beyond the skeletons of stately churches, still to be seen in such places as Buildwas, Wenlock, and Tintern, in its superb setting by the Wye.

Some of the families of the Lords Marchers grew to be very powerful; we can imagine the almost princely rule of the de Laceys at Ludlow, the Greys at Ruthin, and the Mortimers at Wigmore, who mingled their strain with the blood royal of England. A feud between such

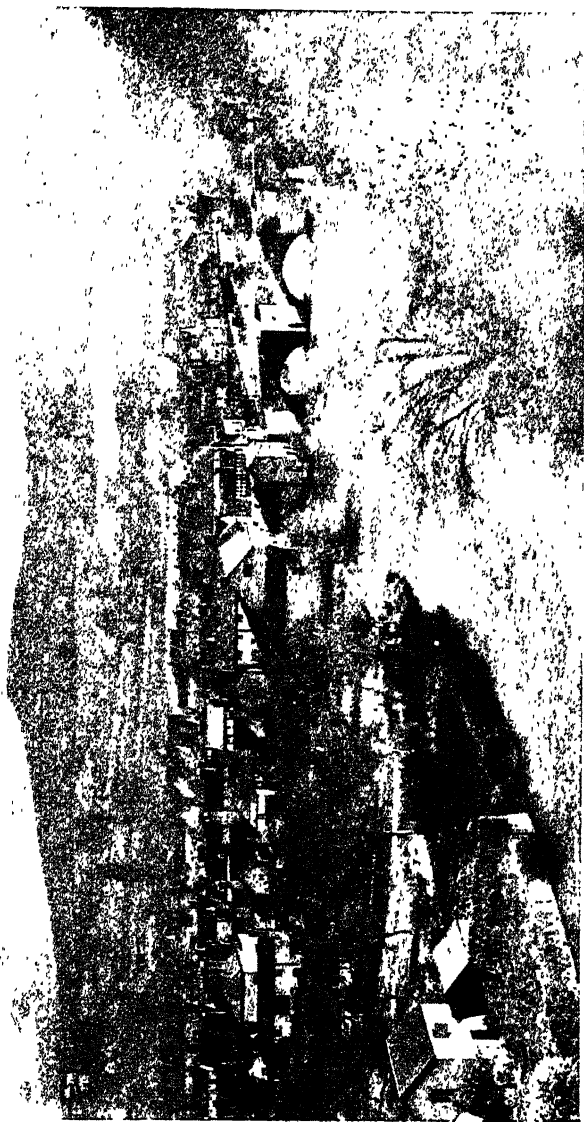
potentates might lead to a local war on a small scale, with marchings, skirmishes, and protracted sieges, as was the case at Ludlow in Stephen's reign, when the castle, according to a romantic tradition, was betrayed by a woman's heart. During the fifteenth century the Borderland suffered grievously, as indeed did most parts of England, from the tyranny of barons possessed of effective private armies and almost absolute power. It was Edward IV, himself a Mortimer, who aimed the first blow at the Marcher system, but it was not until the reign of Henry VIII that the real change came, when the district at last became transformed from a series of bristling petty fiefs, set in wild, remote, and dangerous country, into a tract of some of the quietest and most lovely of the English and Welsh shires.

From Roman times Chester has been the northern gateway to Wales and its Marches, but the antiquities and long history of the old city by the Dee, so often chronicled, must be passed over in these pages. We are hasty travellers, and must make our way quickly southward through the rather monotonous farmlands of the Vale of Dee, skirted to westward by the gaunt and rolling line of the eastward extensions of the Clwydian Hills, whose slopes are smudged with collieries and dotted with grim mining hamlets in red brick. South of Wrexham comes the great swing of the river, issuing from its fine upper valley by Llangollen, and some three miles farther south the Ceiriog sweeps down from the hills in a roughly parallel wooded trough which, though little known, is certainly one of the most beautiful tracts of country to be found hereabouts. But this properly belongs to Wales, and for present purposes Oswestry

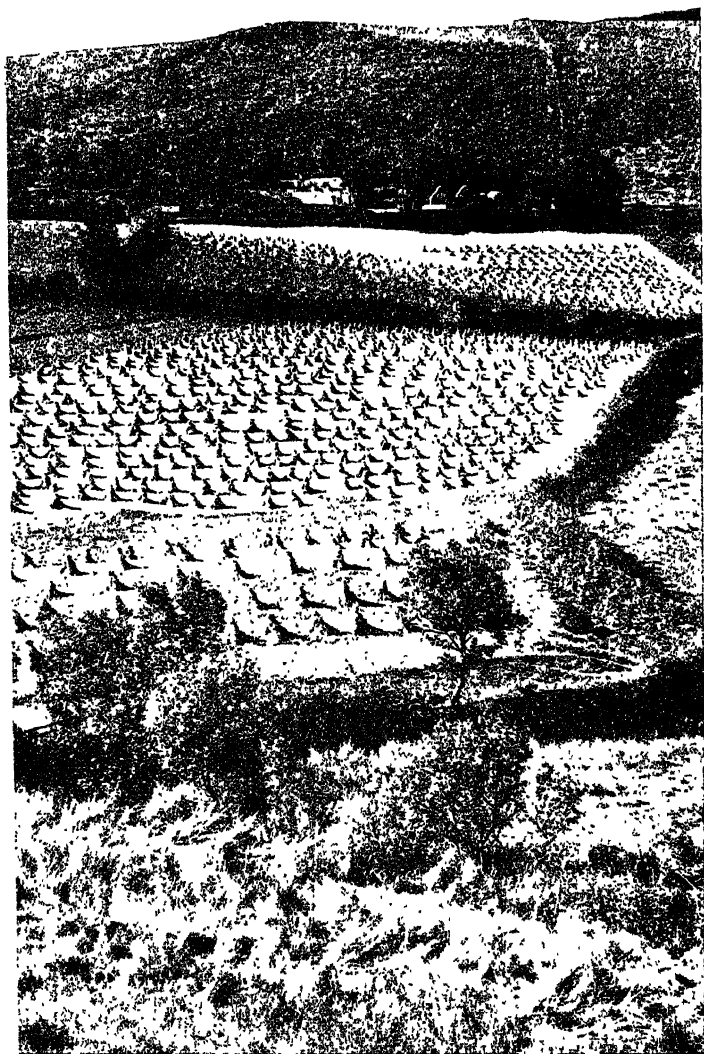
may be taken as a convenient northerly point of departure for our journey.

Oswestry lies pressed against hills which, though geographically a part of England, are as Welsh in appearance and character as in their names. It overlooks the plain farming country of North Shropshire, pooled with frequent meres, and is a pleasant, busy little town giving access to some wonderful country. There is the valley of the Tanat, for instance, which runs down from the massive moorland heights of the Berwyn Hills among woods and swelling pastures; to the south is that of the Vyrnwy, a much broader corridor of farming country. Still farther south, near the junction of the Rhiw and the Severn, is the little town of Montgomery, a peaceful Georgian square beneath a castle crag and Town Hill from which you get what must be one of the most superb views in Britain, over a vast heaving amphitheatre of hill and vale, disappearing into blue wrinkles and said to embrace seven counties.

A mile or so from Montgomery we strike the Severn, flowing serenely in a fine valley, sweeping wide to avoid the hedge-patterned mass of the Long Mountain and the conspicuous triple summit of the Breidden Hills, and finally arriving, broad and majestic, at Shrewsbury, that loveliest of county towns, where we dare not, alas, linger. Between here and Ludlow is the finest stretch of country on the English side, one in which we shall wander now through several paragraphs, so that the reader is again implored to consult a map, for without one our outline of it will necessarily be obscure. Through it from north to south there is only one main continuous line of communication, Stretton Dale, a corridor well-known to the Romans, which carries the modern road and



70 LUDLOW ON THE TEME, LOOKING TO TITTERSTONE CLEE



71 HARVEST-TIME IN THE DEE VALLEY, NEAR BALA,  
MERIONETH

railway from Shrewsbury to Hereford by way of Church Stretton, a recent and unattractive little spa set gloriously against the moorland wall of the Long Mynd, here slashed by steep combes into a series of dome-like summits. The Mynd is the largest and in many ways the most individual of the Shropshire ridges (the Salop 'y', by the way, is sounded short). While others are largely wooded, its slopes are smooth and treeless, but there is compensation in its splendid range of seasonal colouring—the greens and russets of bracken, the purple and black of heather, or the rain-soaked verdure of bent and bilberry. On a windy day it is an invigorating experience to follow the turf track that runs along its crest, looking westward to the serrated ridge-line of the Stiperstones, with its tor-like outcrops of dark rock and hidden mineral wealth of pinkish Baryte, or beyond to the singularly graceful peak of Corndon Hill, facing sheer across country to Montgomery. Immediately beneath us, in a secluded combe, is the hamlet of Ratlinghope, possibly one of the least accessible in England;—and indeed it is a lonely country, and can be a forbidding one in its winter garb. As recently as 1865 a local parson wandered for two days lost in the snow on the Long Mynd on his way from Ratlinghope to Woolstaston, and when at last he stumbled on a cottage, his appearance was so alarming that he was mistaken by the children for a 'bogle'.

Across the Dale lie the detached Stretton Hills, an irregular cluster of green summits that contrasts with the wall-like continuity of the Mynd. Of these, Caradoc and the Lawley are the most imposing, the former a genuine little mountain plunging down steeply on the Stretton side and sinking to remarkable smooth hollows among its eastern spurs; the latter a solid outpost overlooking



the broken farming country that leads down to the Severn, where the great Roman city of Uriconium stood near the present sleepy little Wroxeter. Here an extraordinarily interesting group of houses can be visited: the Elizabethan Condovery; Pitchford, patterned like a zebra in half-timber; classical Attingham; and the pinkish fourteenth-century shell of Acton Burnell, beside its beautiful little church. Here it may be mentioned that the village church on a grand scale is rare in these parts. The more usual type is diminutive, even severe, with a plain stone tower or quite frequently a shingled or half-timber bellcote that peeps very pleasantly above the straggling orchard-tangle of its village.

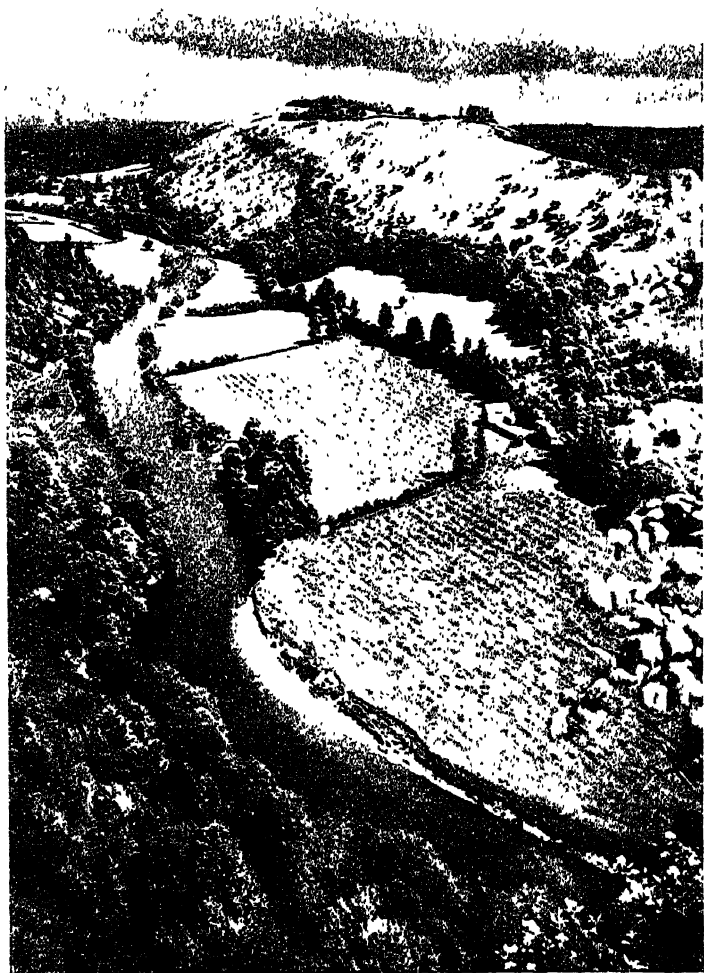
Separated from the Stretton Hills by the low green chequer-work of Ape Dale is Wenlock Edge, which, if it never attains the height and mass of the Long Mynd, is just as distinctive in its continuity and character. The escarpment that faces Ape Dale is abrupt and densely timbered, largely with brushwood. From the crest road it plunges in places like a shaggy cliff a sheer four hundred feet, and it was at one of these, by Presthope to be precise, that during the Civil War Major Smallman of Wilderhope, hotly pursued by Roundhead cavalry, put his horse over the crest in a flying leap that killed the animal but left the rider miraculously unhurt, to make good his escape through the woodland tangle. The place is still known as the 'Major's Leap'. For all the fifteen miles of its length this western escarpment preserves the same shaggy character, but from the crest it is curious to observe that the Edge is in reality a double line. The second and easterly ridge, which is appreciably the higher, is slashed at almost regular intervals by wooded gulleys, each with its stream almost hidden in the thick

undergrowth of its 'hope'—a local word for these steep dingles that frequently emerges in the place-names. Most of the gulleys shelter a farm-house, rather untidy generally, and very lonely; and if you cross the Edge by Roman Bank above Rushbury you will pass perhaps the most remarkable of these, Upper Millichope, incorporating a stern thirteenth-century tower, with a window which has a slotted mullion evidently intended to take a wooden beam in case of Welsh attack. For all its length the Edge is dotted with tiny hamlets and old houses—Wilderhope of the Smallmans, for instance, and the Elizabethan Lutwyche; and at the northern end, set in a hollow at 500 feet, is the little town of Much Wenlock, with its remains of the abbey of St. Milburga including a singularly beautiful Prior's Lodging, looking across country to the shaggy isolated whale-back of the Wrekin.

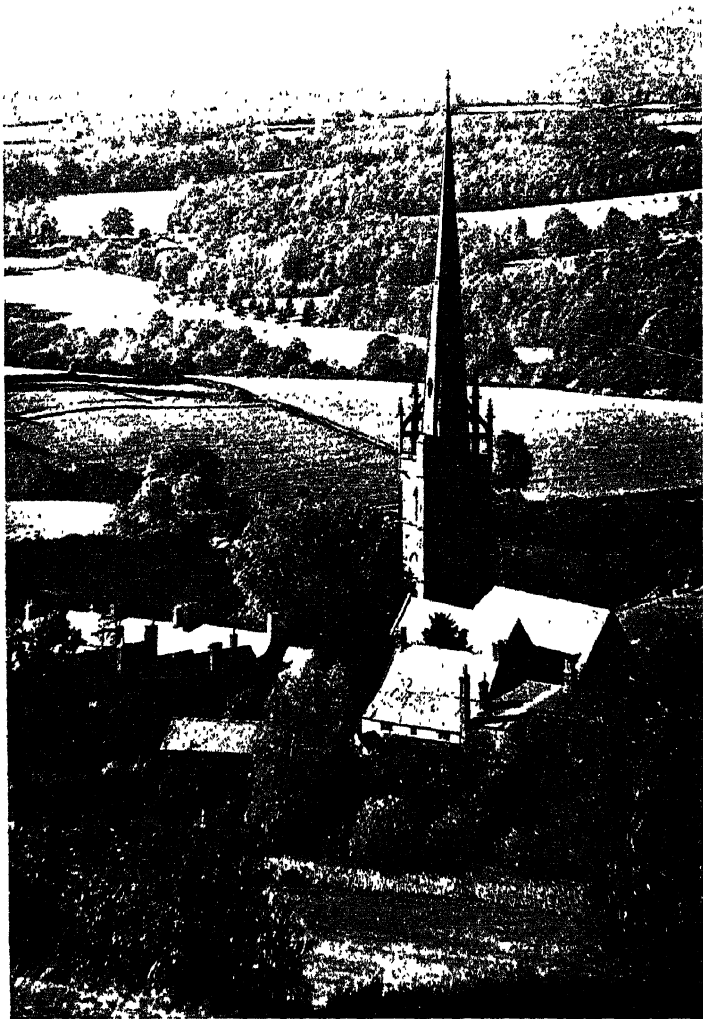
Beneath the eastern slope stretches Corve Dale, a shallow green expanse once reckoned the finest farming country of the Welsh Border. But 'Corve Dale Prime Arable' is now largely laid down to grass, and its verdant chequer-work seldom disturbed by slashes of purple ploughland. Wandering among the tangled lanes of 'the Dale', as it is called locally, with their bushy hedgerows picked out with clumps of holly, among untidy, intensely rural villages of brick and timber, we are overlooked by the blunt double mass of the Brown Clee, the highest point of Midland England, breasted by lower ridges that send out big spurs into the Dale. The approach to this fine hill from Ludlow is in itself an initiation to anyone fresh to this scenery. First there is the rolling plateau-county of Hayton's Bent, with its scattered woods and far-flung farms and hamlets, rising at Hoptongate to over 800 feet; then, passing the forlorn little church of

Cold Weston, the hill lane twists through Clee St. Margaret, where for some hundred yards it runs between high hedges in the actual bed of a bustling little brook, which the motorist must hope is not in spate. This village, though perhaps of little intrinsic beauty, clings adorably to its green slopes, and is such an odd tangle of cottage, farmyard, and orchard—livestock strolling unconcernedly up and down its street—that it becomes one of the liveliest memories of our journey. East of it rises the camp-crowned bluff of Nordy Bank, and it is not long before our lane, passing near the little Norman Heath Chapel, debouches on the open moorland of the Clee itself, with its long westward views over the ridges. Rounding the northern flank at a level thousand feet the contrast is very dramatic. Rough moor gives way to the fine glades of the Burwarton estate, and the view changes from a tangle of ridge and hill to the blue, heaving and almost illimitable expanse of the Midland Plain.

Facing the Brown Clee across a thousand-foot *col* is the neighbour hill-mass of Titterstone Clee, whose rippling outline is familiar to every Ludlow visitor. How long this will remain intact is problematic, for the volcanic basalt granite of the Clees provides one of the finest road materials in the world, and if the Brown Clee is still largely unscarred by quarries, Titterstone, particularly on its southern flank, is dotted with grim little settlements. From here the road plunges some three hundred feet in little over half a mile on its descent to the pastoral environs of Ludlow, and it is not long before we see the tall tower of St. Lawrence's rising above its vista of roof-tops. Here we must slacken our pace, for we are on the threshold of one of the most adorable small towns in England, and must approach it in a mood befitting its quiet beauty.



72 THE WYE AT SYMOND'S YAT, HEREFORDSHIRE



73 RUARDEAN IN DEAN FOREST, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, LOOKING  
TO THE HILLS OF WALES

Ludlow is circled on three sides by the Teme joining the Corve, and in the quiet of night there are few points in the town from which you cannot hear the rustle and whisper of their weirs. Cross the river by either one of the fine bridges, Ludford or Dinham, and climb to the crest of Whitcliffe, the steep green down that overlooks the town from across the river. Below, the rivers encircle it like a bright girdle; opposite, tree-grown slopes rise steeply to the lichened towers and bastions of the castle, one of the largest and best-preserved in England, with a store of memories from which it would be idle to select at random, though it is hard to resist the picture of *The Masque of Comus* first performed by torchlight within its walls to a rustling company of the flower of England. Drop to Ludford Bridge, with its rows of jutting cutwaters, and make your way through the tiny gateway up wide, steep Broad Street, with its capacious merchants' houses in Georgian brick, memorials of industry departed. The town centres around the old hall called the Butter Cross, and you should make a point of seeing those fine old timbered inns, the 'Angel' and the 'Feathers', and reserve at least an hour for the great church of St. Lawrence, built of a very lovely pinkish sandstone, beautiful without as within. It stands secluded from the town in a small churchyard square, with a northward view over river, wood, and meadow that must be unrivalled in its pastoral beauty.

Leaving Ludlow by Ludford Bridge, the Wigmore road leads us through perhaps the finest diversity of hill and wood that the Border Country can offer. Cresting Whitcliffe, you climb steadily through young oak woods to the ridge of M<sup>ary</sup> Knowl, where an abrupt little knob looks far across the forested gorge in which the Sidney

children wandered, lost on that memorable adventure that gave Milton the inspiration for his *Comus*, to the shaggy slopes of the High Vinnalls, with a glimpse of the blue Malverns away beyond. Drop through Elton and Long Leinthall and you come to Wigmore, pressed closely to its wooded hills, the Rolls, now partially deforested, and looking out over a brief unexpected stretch of marshland by which stands the great Grange Farm that incorporates parts of the old abbey. Wigmore's quiet street ends in a windy churchyard with a fine view, and above you stands the husk of the castle of the Mortimers, cresting its mound, once the most splendid and terrible of Border strongholds. The triangle of wooded hill-country between here, Aymestrey and Lingen is particularly fine, and the upland lanes provide splendid rolling views for those hardy enough to explore them, in winter burnished with the purplish gloss of larches, and generally ending in the austere ridge-line of Radnor Forest.

A few miles north-west is the emphatically Welsh-looking townlet of Knighton, a great sheep market surrounded by the big forested hills of the Upper Teme. The motorist who enjoys steep roads may be advised to take the one that runs due north from here to Clun, another little town of severe Welsh aspect, where, if he is so minded, he can branch westward across the wind-swept moorland ridges of Clun Forest—for the last stretch of the road, above Kerry, newly planted out with young conifers. If instead, however, he takes the road south-west from Knighton, he will find his way blocked, literally, by the heart-shaped massif of Radnor Forest, an imposing barrier of green moorland rising to 2,000 feet, largely treeless but dappled with bracken—on the east folded into steep combs that mark the

tracks of vigorous winter torrents. There are no roads across the Forest, and habitation is sparse and scattered; but to the jaded citizen its wide and windy spaces, lightly sprinkled with sheep, provide an ideal recuperative tonic.

From Radnor Forest, a tumbled hill country, very Welsh, stretches southward to where the Wye sweeps in a great semicircle from Builth, through the small stone market-town of Hay, to Whitney, where it debouches on the Herefordshire plain. The road from Ludlow to Ross gives an excellent impression of this latter, a fresh, likeable orchard country, and connects some of its most attractive centres. There is Leominster, a pleasant market-town with timbered houses, whose bustle should put neighbour Ludlow to shame. There is Hereford, the county town beside the Wye, with its broad old streets and long-suffering cathedral that makes one weep for the nineteenth century; and there is Ross itself, a pretty place with a fine church and old houses clustered above the river—no longer, for some reason, the honeymooning resort that it was in Victorian days. But the motorist who confines himself exclusively to the main road will miss some of the loveliest villages of this district, or, indeed, of all the Western Midlands—a half-timber group some miles south-west of Leominster that includes Weobley, Pembridge, Eardisland, and Dilwyn, each clad in its coat of black and white to the virtual exclusion of other materials. With their fine churches, varied cottage groups, and pretty brooks these are indeed delightful places to ‘discover’, set in an uphill country of steep lanes leading to magpie farms and an infinity of rolling views.

Though the classic reaches of the Wye are those south of Hereford, to some of us the stretch from Rhayader to Hay is the scenic high-point of this beautiful river, for



here, though broad and stately, it still flows with something of the sweep of a mountain stream. From Three Cocks Inn it is overlooked by the high, bare wall of the Black Mountains, which rises bold and bleak to over 2,000 feet above the wooded shelves of foothills. While the main escarpment faces the Wye in an unbroken line, the ridges stretch away from it south-eastward, almost at right-angles, for many miles, divided by a series of steep valleys, each threaded by its swift river. The wild beauty of these valleys, with their small white farms and tumbled woods, is dwarfed by the austere sweeps of the heights above them. The life there is remote and lonely. Their heads form a veritable end of the world—though only some five or six miles from Hay and the Wye they are entirely secluded by the wall of the escarpment, and it is a 15–20 mile run by road. But rough steep tracks make their way across the mountain crest, called *Rhins* by the Welsh—possibly the similarity to the French *rue* is only a coincidence. It is a heartening sight to see a farmer's wife picking her way on a donkey over one of these stony ways, her panniers bulging with market produce. In one of the valleys, the Olchen Glen, the large farm is patriarchally self-contained; it bakes its own bread, with a wonderful variety of scones, and has a room fitted with benches for church service on Sunday evening. In another lies the shell of Llanthony Abbey—not the establishment so ingeniously boosted by the late 'Father Ignatius', situated some miles farther up the Honddhu and now a girl's school—but a genuine Cistercian settlement of the thirteenth century, prematurely abandoned before the Reformation and now surely the only ruin of a great church in this island that incorporates an inn in its west front.

Abergavenny is the gateway to these glens, and here we meet the Usk, which sweeps down from Brecon in a fertile, well-populated valley, dotted with private estates. Beyond the town the river debouches on a wooded plain, skirted to the west by the hill-escarpment that screens this pleasant country from the grim and populous mining settlements of Glamorganshire. Caerleon, with its unique traces of Roman occupation, marks the end of real 'country', and at Newport we are on the fringe of the industrial environs of Cardiff.

Roughly parallel with the Usk, the Wye flows from Ross among the wooded heights of Dean, through reaches whose beauty is so familiar that it hardly needs recapitulation in these pages. Symond's Yat is in truth a 'beauty spot', but the shaggy uplands of the Forest of Dean that stretch eastward between the Wye and the Severn are less familiar to most people, and perhaps with some reason, for their small mining towns and villages are grimy, forbidding little places to say the least of it. Nevertheless, Dean preserves some wonderful stretches of forest of the most varied kind—vast groves of conifers, oaks worthy of Robin Hood, and dense brushwood that opens occasionally to reveal a still, dark pool. And from the higher ground there are often magnificent views, as from Ruardean, here pictured, which faces over a splendid expanse of country to the Black Mountains and beyond.

Past Monmouth the river winds in a deep gorge, at the foot of which lies the stately ruin of Tintern, perhaps the least bit spoilt by recent building development around it. Chepstow follows with its great castle, and from the heights of Windcliff we get our first view of the Severn Estuary at the confluence of the two great waterways of the Welsh Border.

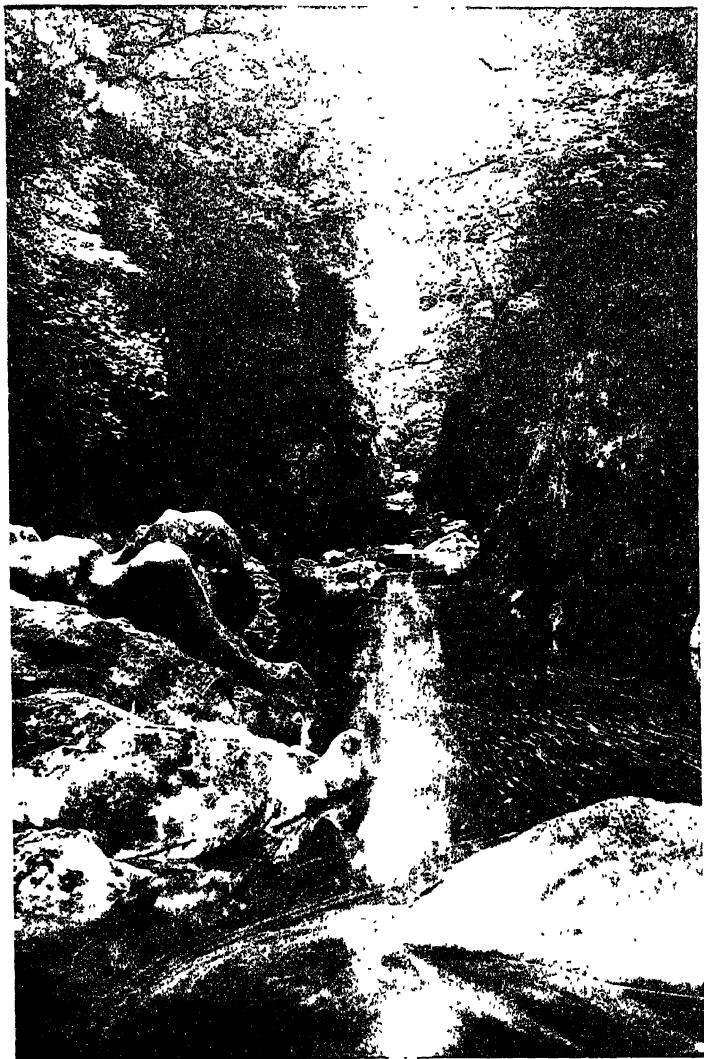
# Edmund Vale

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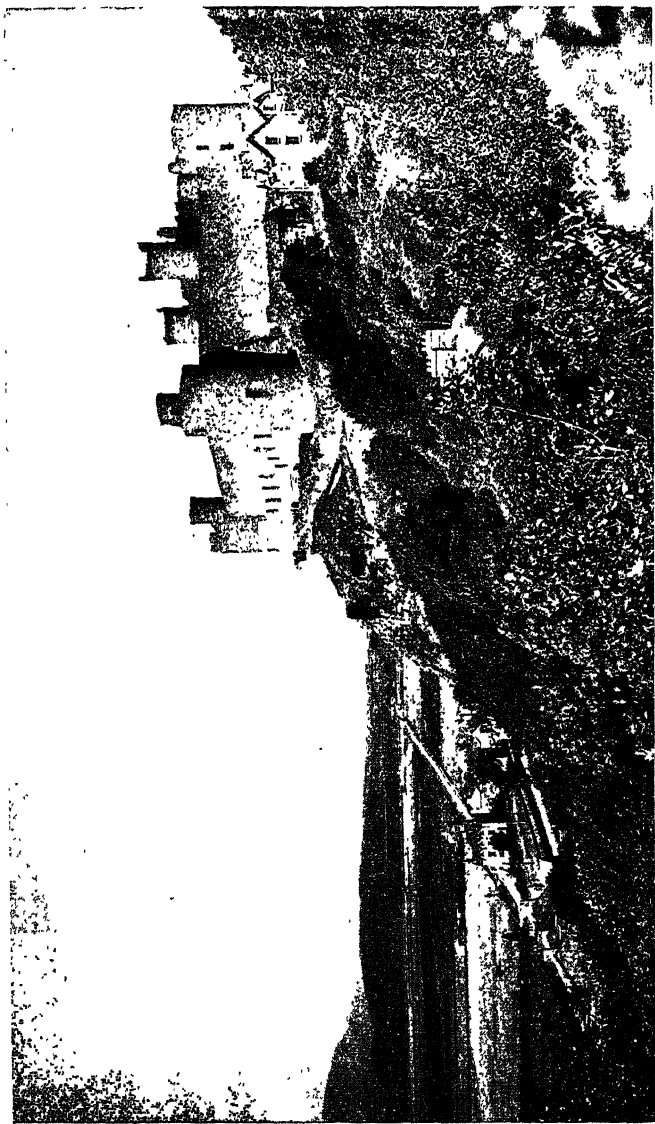
## WALES: *THE SPIRIT AND THE FACE*

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WALES is an extraordinary mixture of the obvious and the recondite. The stranger is immediately struck by the variety and richness of her scenery, the magnificence of her ruins of medieval feudalism, and the abundance of her relics of the Stone Age. It is very probable that these things will give him sufficient entertainment and lend him sufficient local colour wherever he goes, so that he will not find it needful to go any deeper. But if he were to reflect a moment, he would find that none of these obvious things in Wales were essentially Welsh. The scenery was provided by Nature, the castles by the Normans and English, the great stone cromlechs by a race which inhabited Wales a good 2,000 years before a single Welshman arrived there. In fact, there is nothing in Wales to remind the stranger of the Welsh people except the sound of their language and the look



74 THE GLEN OF THE LLUGWY, NEAR BETTWS-Y-COED,  
CARNARVONSHIRE



73 HARLECH CASTLE, MERIONETH

of their place-names. Far otherwise is it in Scotland and Ireland, where one is always coming across characteristic types of nationality in buildings, costume, musical instruments, dishes, drinks, sweetmeats, and tourists' souvenirs.

All the same, the whole of the Principality is pervaded by an invisible essence which issues from invisible sources and which we may call Welsh atmosphere. It may not be noticed by the visitor, but its absence would be quickly detected if the Welsh people were to be suddenly eliminated. Therefore I think that this brief sketch of Wales should begin with a slight and informal introduction to her people.

At the outset it should be remembered that the Welsh have never had the publicity of the Irish or the Scotch. They have had no novelists to inculcate their mysteries into English hearts. Their land cannot be parcelled out under the labels of heroes and poets whose names conjure up that flavour of romance which every tourist knows how to avail himself of. It is even forgotten that the gorgeous glamour of the Elizabethan period had its origin in Wales—for the House of Tudor came from Anglesey.

The language, too, gets unfair treatment. It has long been the fashion to believe that no Englishman can pronounce Welsh, and that even to attempt to do so is to incur the grave physical risk of a broken jaw. But what language beside his own can an Englishman pronounce? He takes some pains with French, but the result is only a convention supported by faith which the accommodating Frenchman has learned how to interpret. Yet, conversation apart, this French convention gives the Englishman a peculiar joy in France herself, for it makes the place-names yield a vital atmosphere of Frenchness which they could not do if

pronounced badly as spelt with English alphabet sounds, after the manner adopted by our soldiers during the war. If English people would only throw the shackles of fashion overboard and find a convention for Welsh they would reap a great additional joy, in touring Wales, out of those place-names which they now regard as bogies.

But in the matter of Welsh atmosphere the place-names are only a kind of still-life. The dynamic force is to be found in the mentality of the Welshman. He has a rare gift of imagination. This shows itself in many different ways. It makes him a prince of raconteurs. If he talks to you about his farmstead or his mountain, or tells of his early life as a soldier or a sailor, he will hold you spell-bound. It is quite natural for every small farmer and labouring man to write poetry. Such poetry is not of a high order, but it is well above the standard of versifying because the power of apt metaphor is part of every Welshman's mental equipment. With the same ease and with the same picturesque assurance he speculates on the fairy kingdom and on the nature of life beyond the grave. For this reason the solemnity of a Welsh funeral is really impressive though to the unthinking stranger it appears laughable.

In spite of these high mental and spiritual qualities, and in spite of having a temperamental barometer which rises and falls in extreme degree, the Welshman has no plastic arts. He neither draws nor paints nor builds (except within a limited range—the older type of Welsh cottage is a distinct achievement). He loves his scenery in theory, but in practice he murders it. He has the temperament of an artist without any power of expressing art except in speech, and by singing, and playing on the harp. In these matters the minor key is always

predominant. But he is not a sad dog—far from it. His sense of humour is much keener than that of the Irishman. But for the language barrier he would be the most noted wit in the British Isles. Withal, his qualities are at once mysterious and intriguing and they fit in with the qualities of his scenery in perfect dovetail. You cannot fully enjoy the one without the other.

In the days of the Princes, Wales was always regarded as three entities, the North Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the South Kingdom—Gwynedd, Powis, and Deheubarth. The Middle Kingdom was never a very strong power and seldom stood by its own might. At the present time this Middle Kingdom is only a vague historical memory. Not so, however, the other two. Wales is only a unified country in the mind of the political idealist. In practice it is divided into North Wales and South Wales. The division is precise and occurs at the River Dovey. This point is a boundary not only of Welsh feeling but of scenery also, the sharp mountains lying to the north of the river and the smooth mountains lying to the south. It seems probable, therefore, that natural selection and not chance is responsible for this coincidence. In South Wales, history has delivered two hammer-blows which have differentiated two sections of it from the rest of Wales, and these transforming strokes should never be forgotten when thinking of Wales as a whole. One is the inroad made by the Normans in the twelfth century right along the north coast of the Severn to the cliffs of Pembrokeshire. And the other is the industrialization of the coal-fields of Glamorgan.

Now let us try and fill out some kind of picture of the countryside of Wales. The boundary between England



and Scotland was not fixed until the seventeenth century, in the time of James I, when quite a trivial earthwork known as Scot's Dyke was set up in the old happy hunting-ground of the forayers that until then had been the Debatable Land. But the boundary of Wales was delimited in the eighth century. The great earthwork of Offa's Dyke was then built from the mouth of the Wye in the south to the mouth of the Dee in the north, a distance of over a hundred miles. Even to-day the ruin of it is sufficiently impressive to rival in grandeur the remnant of the stone wall of Hadrian.

The Saxons respected this boundary and made no serious attempts to press their conquest of Britain beyond it. Immediately the Normans came they exerted pressure all along the line of the dyke and set up castles as far west as they dared. Those castles were centres of individual enterprise, and the individuals were known as the Lords Marchers or the Marcher Barons. At one point only the line yielded easily, namely, on the extreme south by Chepstow at the mouth of the Wye, and from there the conquest spread as far west as the Atlantic coast. Along this road to the west are found the ruins of the most magnificent castles of Wales; Chepstow, Caerphilly, Llanstephan, Manorbier, Carew, and Pembroke, with a host more on a lesser scale of grandeur. Everywhere along this old route the Norman and English culture still lingers, fine stone houses are built, fine churches with imposing towers, and even spires, towns on the old English plan. In South Pembrokeshire all the native population were evicted in the twelfth century and a colony of Netherlanders—'the Flemmings'—were introduced in their room. That part is still known as Little England beyond Wales, and no Welsh is spoken



76 THE GREEN CHEQUERWORK OF THE RHEIDOL VALLEY, CARDIGANSHIRE



77 LLYN PADARN, LOOKING TO THE LLANBERIS PASS AND SNOWDON, CARNARVONSHIRE

there. By more peaceful means of penetration the Church managed to place Norman bishops in St. Davids and Llandaff, and abbeys with the Norman mission at heart as well as that of the Gospel were set up in the very heart of Wales.

As the south coast has its line of castles reaching from England to the ocean boundary, so has the north coast another line of castles at Rhuddlan, Conway, Beaumaris, Carnarvon, and Harlech. But they are of quite a different order. The former were as much baronial mansions as fortresses. The latter, all built at the end of the thirteenth century by Edward I after his conquest of all Wales, were just fortified barracks for royal troops. The countryside about them shows no sign of a spread of English culture and remains to-day as Welsh in speech, feeling, and lack of architectural impulse as it ever was.

Thus, with the usual irony of history, the machinery for breaking the strings of the bardic lute has been turned into material for the poet, the artist, and the tourist. Everywhere round the rim of Wales there is a picturesque ruin in the foreground to set off a mountain background majestic in its unalterableness. Indeed, the English conquest has not made a great impression on her people beyond keeping them from fighting each other. The real unit of Welsh geography is still the mountain and not the town or the county. The slight differences between one community of Welsh people and another are nearly always found to be bounded by two watersheds and two passes. The valleys lie east and west and communications lie in the same direction. Hence there is neither direct road nor direct rail transit from South to North Wales. To get from one to the other you must go into England and come out again. This is a perpetual

stumbling-block to the drawing together of North and South and the dispersal of time-honoured prejudices.

The three dominant mountain families in South Wales are the Brecon Beacons and the East and West Black Mountains. The two groups of Black Mountains lie respectively on either side of the Beacons. They have very distinct individualities and it is unfortunate and confusing that they should have similar names. Even the colour is wrong, for they are made of red Devonian sandstone. The East Black Mountains are imposing whale-backed barriers, holding a series of long valleys, all 'blind' at their northern ends. Here is situated that beautiful, lonely ruin of Llanthony Abbey which was deserted by its monks as early as the twelfth century. It was in Stephen's reign, when everyone was lawless and the brethren seemed to have a good excuse of moving to more neighbourly quarters at Gloucester. But, when on the spot, one wonders if it was not the overpowering nature of that savage scenery that overawed them rather than any banditti.

Rome did not love her seven hills more than Brecon loves and boasts about its beacons. They have a fine, dragon-like outline. The West Black Mountains have a mystery all of their own. They culminate in summits known as the Carmarthen Vans. From a lake near the top called the Van Pool comes one of the most touching fairy-tales in Wales. It is a strangely elfin place that might have set coarser imaginations than the Welsh at work. The reddish yellow gravel which paves its floor has a quality in reflecting light which makes the bosom of the lake appear luminous. In all the mountain sculpture of Wales there is nothing so severe and restrained as that of the great cliff above and beside the Van Pool.

The south flank of these Black Mountains is seared with the operations of the mining industry, but their northern mass rises from the lovely valley of the upper Towy, down which the road from Brecon to Carmarthen runs, and there is not a taint of any kind. Here, as cynosure of a pastoral paradise, lies Llandilo.

Castles built by the Welsh themselves are exceedingly rare, but there are three of them within a few miles of Llandilo—Dryslwyn, Dynevor, and Carrig Cennen. The two former crown sharp hillocks which rise from the river level. But Carrig Cennen is built on a towering mass of limestone with natural bastions of its own and, to look at, is surely the most romantic castle in the whole of the British Isles.

Where the waters of the Towy meet the sea-tides Carmarthen is situated. It has one of the busiest, most varied, and most interesting markets in Wales. And here, on any market day, you may see a touch of costume, a reminiscent relic of the old Welsh dress. It is the cockle-women who wear it. The tall beaver has been reduced to a high-crowned felt hat of peculiar shape and the white gophered head-frill has become a coloured shawl, but the petticoats are as voluminous as ever. The cockle industry is prosecuted with great vigour at the mouth of the Towy, in the crook of Carmarthen Bay, by the inhabitants of a single village, Llansaint, which stands on a lonely hill-top right off the beaten track. In all seasons and in all weathers these hardy folk tramp their two miles down to the far-flung sands in a picturesque cavalcade with panniered donkeys. In the salmon season they are not the only figures on those wide stretches, for the channels are dotted by a fleet of rowing-boats from which the salmon-netters work. A little farther west,

at Pendine, these same sands furnish a very different kind of sport to a very different kind of person. They are the 'Daytona Beach of Britain', and every keen racing motorist must know them.

But before we continue our westward trend we may note the eastern shoulder of Carmarthen Bay. It is the Peninsula of Gower, a compact little gem of country, beautiful in its mountain, its farmlands, and its sea-beaches. It is still almost unspoilt although it lies right on the fringe of the industrial area, with Swansea, the last outpost of smoke and spoil-bank on its landward side.

Had we come south of the Black Mountains and the Brecon Beacons, as the old Norman route did, and the main line of the Great Western Railway does, we should have come through Cardiff, the commercial capital of Wales, and through the principal centres of the tin-plate industry. But we should not have seen much of the mining, as the collieries are all in the narrow valleys which run up into the mountains. Our way would have been through the broad Vale of Glamorgan, which has always been one of the richest agricultural districts in Wales.

But to continue our thread of topography from the mouth of the Towy. I would not move west without advising the visitor to see Llanstephan and the delightful country between it and Laugharn. Llanstephan is a fair example of what the relics of Norman culture can do to make a Welsh village beautiful and unique.

Beyond Pendine is Tenby, with its outlying Isle of Caldy. We are in Pembrokeshire. The Severn Estuary has now opened wide enough to admit Atlantic rollers. Here the principal note of scenery is not mountains but Cliffs, high limestone cliffs, in places echoing the roar of the sea from splendid caverns, as at Lydstep.

The coast swings round to Milford Haven, with the county town of Pembroke situated upon its waters. What a history of shipping, of smuggling, of fishing has been made in Milford Haven! The first volume is closing, if not closed, and one waits with eagerness the announcement of a second. Off St. Anne's Head, at the northern entrance to Milford Haven, lie several islands which preserve memories of the Vikings in their names of Scandinavian origin—Skomer, Skokholm, and Grassholm. Their rock scenery is fine, and as bird sanctuaries they are among the most interesting of any on the British coast. Marlowes is the fishing village which has the most intimate connection with them, and among the fishermen there it is not hard to detect at a glance the Norse strain. Haverfordwest lies inland from here. It has a church with remarkably carved capitals. Had this building been in England or Scotland its capitals would probably have figured in every text-book on architecture.

North from St. Anne's Head and the islands with Scandinavian names is St. Bride's Bay, a name reminiscent of the early Celtic Church, for Bride and Bridget are one. And indeed the country continuing from the north of this bay is the holiest ground in all Wales, having for its centre the isolated cathedral city of St. Davids. Motoring now brings the tourist here easily enough. But it seems only a little while ago that the pilgrimage was far more difficult and the pilgrims far less numerous than in the Middle Ages.

The wild half-moorland country north of St. Davids is dominated by a high and stately range which out of courtesy and sentiment we ought, like the Welsh, to rear into the dignity of a mountain. It is called Precelly,



and is a landmark that can be descried from the heart of the shires of Carmarthen and Cardigan, and even from Ireland on a clear day. Beyond Precelly lies Fishguard, and then, although in Pembrokeshire still, we are out of Little England beyond Wales and in the thick of a Welsh-speaking population.

The coast of North Pembroke is the boldest and grandest in Wales. But exigencies of space compel us to pass over its many interesting scenes and places with a mention of only one name, the little village of Nevern. Here the artist and archaeologist may spend a busy day within the compass of a few hundred yards.

Across the main road bridge over the River Teify lies both the county and the county town of Cardigan. The people of this shire have a great reputation for independence and speak of themselves as 'the Cardy boys'. A triumphant example of their way of doing things may be seen at their seaport of New Quay. Here, in the eighteenth century, the Government offered them the services of the great harbour engineer Rennie to equip their shipping with adequate protection from the sea. But the Cardy boys chose to do the work for themselves. The result is quite the most spectacular quay wall that any marine painter could wish to put on canvas. I don't know how it served the practical purpose for which it was originally built, but now that shipping at New Quay is no more it must serve the place well as an ideal object of sea romanticism for visitors to come and gaze on. Indeed, the whole of New Quay has a special sea charm that outrivals the studied 'quaintness' of the majority of coast villages where artists and photographers resort. The scenery of Cardiganshire is dependent on the nature of a shale rock. Inland, this causes the rivers to

flow in deep gorges embowered by trees, and on the coast it projects in blue noses veined with broad bands of white quartz. I could linger long over the delights of Cardiganshire, but the mention of New Quay reminds me that we must get back to the mountains. You can see them from there, rising and rising along the sweep of Cardigan Bay till they culminate in the splendid peaks of Snowdon.

To keep touch with the continuity of the mountains we should go right back to the East Black Mountains, round the northern flank of which curves the River Wye. If we follow this stream northwards till we arrive at Builth we shall come between two ranges of high heather-clad hills. Epynt Mountain is the chief of those on the west, while those on the east go by the general name of Radnor Forest. At Builth we touch the southern confines of the old central kingdom of Powis. Here, to the west, a pass leads through the Plynlimon Spur—twenty miles of wild and very beautiful scenery—into East Cardiganshire. North, the road goes to Rhyadr, where an artificially dammed valley stores water for Birmingham, to which it is linked by a great subterranean aqueduct.

Builth is an ancient name made historical by the Norman family of De Breos, who had penetrated thus far beyond Offa's dyke and set up their fortress. Here also the last Welsh Prince of Wales, Llewelyn ap Gruffydd, perished. It is now, with its district, quite anglicized and the English name of Wells has been added to it, which emphasizes its modern importance as a spa and brings it into uniformity with a group of neighbouring places all possessing sulphur springs. The rest of this family are Llandrindod Wells, Llangammarch Wells, and Llanwrtyd Wells. The upper Wye Valley between Builth and Rhyadr might be called the 'Heart of Modern

Mid-Wales'. The district has a strong individuality. There is a sparkling brilliance about its tree, heather, and rock scenery that can hardly be overrated even by guide-books.

The Epynt Hills melt insensibly into the Plynlimon group, whose characteristics are rounded grassy shapes culminating in one very definite and distinctive mountain—Plynlimon. Although in height Plynlimon only rises 2,465 feet, there is something very grand and definite about it. It is a mountain to which a bard might attach all manner of sentiments. It is the corner-stone of the three provinces of Wales, and it stands above three towns, each typical of one of these. At the foot of its seaward slope is Aberystwyth, the last stronghold of the South-walian. At its northern foot is Machynlleth, through which the Dovey goes. Here the South Wales accent prevails, but there is every other evidence that you are in touch with North Wales feeling. To the east lies Llanidloes, where there is no doubt that you are in Mid-Wales. Plynlimon gives birth to both the Severn and the Wye.

Beyond the Dovey the mountain region takes on a dramatic change. It ceases to be smooth in outline, becoming sharp, precipitous, and savage. In fact, the narrow strip of land which lies between the Dovey and the Mawddach estuary carries three of the most striking mountains in Wales, the two Arans and Cader Idris. Aberdovey lies to the south of it and Dolgelly to the north. The latter lacks the usual bastard buildings of most Welsh towns. The houses are all made of stone and are Welsh in type, which is something of an architectural triumph for the Principality, especially as so many English visitors resort there.

Across the Mawddach is the land known in old times

as Ardudwy (remember to pronounce your Welsh *u* as an *i*). It extends right up to the Vale of Ffestiniog and comprises the coast towns of Barmouth and Harlech. Before passing over into it we must make mention of the mountains that sweep to the eastward in continuation of Cader Idris and the two Arans. They are the Berwens. For some reason these mountains are almost as little explored by tourists as the Epynts. Yet the range is a very beautiful and individual one. It spreads out eastwards almost to the English Border in the form of a broad tableland which has been worn into innumerable furrows by the clear streams which run southward from its watershed to feed the Severn, and northward to feed the Dee. The whole of its valleys and tops are thickly clothed with heather and bilberry, giving it a gorgeous apparel in summer. Its summits rise from the midst of its mass, making a wall-like line running east and west, dividing the shires of Merioneth and Montgomery. The highest is Moel Sych, which achieves 2,713 feet. South of the range lies the great artificial lake of Vyrnwy, which supplies Liverpool with water. To the north is a natural lake of about the same size at Bala. Here the Dee rises and keeps to the foot of the Berwens through Corwen and Llangollen.

Beyond Bala Lake there stands a remarkable solitary mountain with a flat top—Arenig Fawr (2,500 feet). In the grandeur of its outline and loneliness it is comparable to the mountain of Muckish in the highlands of Donegal. Now we may go northward again from Dolgelly into Ardudwy. The principal mountains here are the Rhinogs. They have knob-like summits and the country about them is dotted with little lakes, all full of trout. Probably this region is the most luxuriant in vegetation

in Wales. Many of the valleys are well treed, and mosses and ferns grow with great richness everywhere. The Rhinogs stand between the sea and the long valley of Trawsfynydd (*Trowsvuneth* in English spelling), and there are two remarkable passes leading from one to the other. In the lower one, which has an almost uncanny spell of gloom, is situated the farm of Maes-y-Garnedd, which was built by Colonel Jones, who married Oliver Cromwell's sister and was one of the signatories of the death-warrant of Charles I. The house has been little altered since the day it was built.

The other pass may be written down as one of the principal gems of Welsh scenery. It is known to the English by the name of the Roman Steps. From Llanbedr, on the coast, the road takes you up to the lovely lake of Cwm Bychan. Thence the way lies over a high saddle in the mountains, and the steep path is made possible for pack-horses by long flights of rough stone steps. The scenic and floral setting of this two-mile stairway is unique, and the fact that antiquarians disagree about its origin only enhances its mystery.

The great rock on which Harlech Castle stands is the north corner-stone of Ardudwy. Here Cardigan Bay takes a sharp right-angled turn from north to west, forming the bottom of that familiar arm-like projection which is one of the characteristics of the map of Britain. This is called the Peninsula of Llyn. It is a world of its own almost as much as if it had been an island. Off its extreme toe lies the sacred Isle of Bardsey, whose abbey, with its relics, formed one of the principal pilgrimages in the Middle Ages. It has three towns which run a flourishing trade in visitors in the summer season—Criccieth and Pwllheli on the south, and Nevin in the north.

Into the corner, where the bay turns sharply, comes the estuary of the Glaslyn over the head-waters of which stands the focus of all Welsh sentiment and song, the mountain Snowdon. It is a happy coincidence that the highest of all the Welsh mountains has also the most beautiful outline and the most individualistic appearance no matter from what aspect it is seen. If a 'best view' of Snowdon must be claimed, it is hard to beat the one to which our descriptive causerie has led us, namely, a point on the Portmadoc embankment. From here, in the springtime, when the water of the Glaslyn is a deep blue and the marsh flats on each side are golden with gorse, you may see the peak of Snowdon soaring above, an ethereal azure mass, framed between two nearer ranks of sharp peaked mountains.

The other side of Snowdon is turned to Carnarvon Bay and the Irish Sea, which are parted from each other by a large island which constitutes a shire in itself—Anglesey. From the promontory of Holyhead on the remote side of this Isle of Anglesey one can look back on the whole Snowdon range. And in that view the secret of how the Welsh kept their independence for long after the Norman conquest of England, and the secret of how they lost it, both appear. On the one hand the mountains stretch out through the Lleyen Peninsula to the Sound of Bardsey. On the other hand they throw up summit after summit till they make a dramatic finish above the estuary of the River Conway. It was at this estuary that the English army, coming down the coast from Chester, always halted and became baffled. The Welsh retired into the valleys of the Snowdon fastness, where they could feed their cattle and their horses. They themselves were fed by the rich grain-bearing

lands of Anglesey until the enemy was starved out and beat a retreat. Edward I conquered Wales by taking Anglesey first of all and thus cutting off the food-supply.

To-day it is the Irish Sea coast which is the principal Welsh host of the English, for along it lies a chain of some of the best-known seaside resorts in the Principality—Prestatyn, Rhyl, Colwyn Bay, Llandudno, Penmaenmawr, and Llanfairfechan. It is the mountains which draw the English now instead of repelling them.

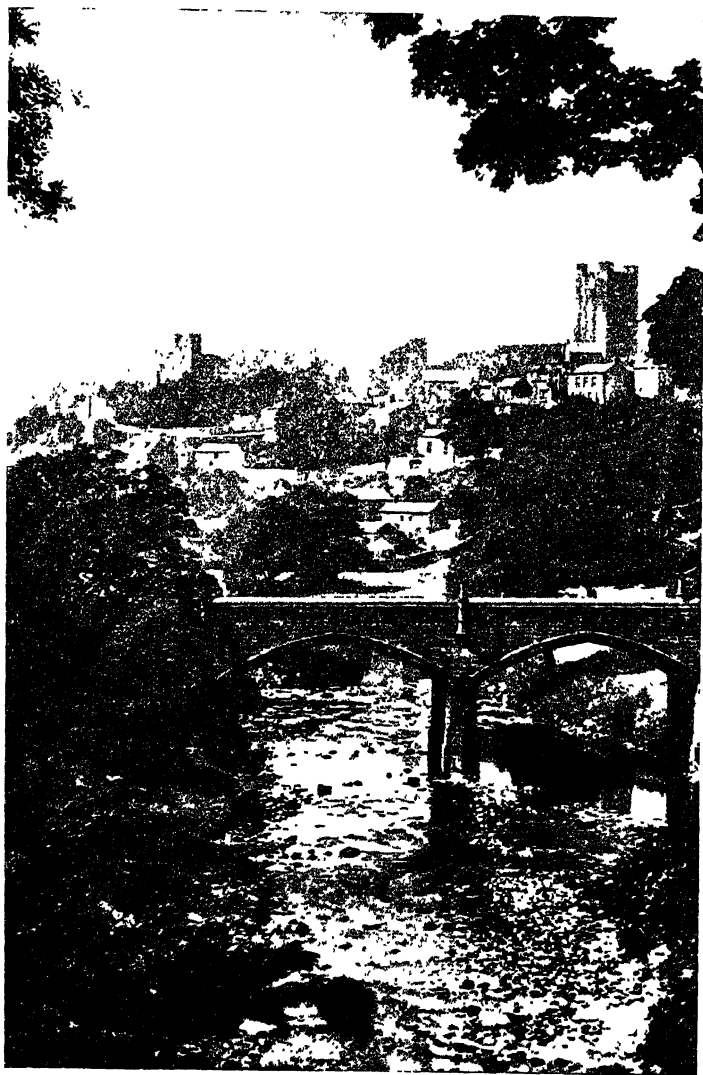
Anglesey has a very subtle charm of its own. The scenery is on a very small scale, small bays, small rivers, small fields, and small whitewashed farmsteads. It is like fairyland, only beautiful to those who can adjust themselves to the fairy scale. To the initiate it is an island without compare.

We have now touched on all the principal mountain system of Wales (with the exception of the Clwydian Range, which lies between Conway and Chester). Though it has been all too brief and inadequate it has occupied a great deal of space. But that is the very impression I wanted to convey. It is the mountain-tops and slopes and not the valley-bottoms and the towns which have given the Welshman his leading characteristics, which are those of the herdsman and not the villager. Herein lies one of the main cleavages in understanding between the Englishman and the Welshman. The Englishman's conception of things is based on time and facts, the Welshman's on signs and imagery. Here the oral tradition is still the guide to all thought and conduct rather than the written word. For this reason there is far more in Wales for a stranger to discover than in any other parts of the British Isles which have been so amply written up.



78 THE SNOWDON RANGE FROM THE SOUTH, CARNARVONSHIRE





J. S. Fletcher

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THE  
NORTH:  
MOORS, DALES AND WOLDS

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NORTH of an imaginary line drawn from Chester to Lincoln the various counties divide themselves, as far as the lover of fine scenery is concerned, into parts to be avoided and parts to be sought for and lingered in. In the old days, before industrialism laid wide-grasping hands on the valleys and rivers, there was scarcely a square mile of the land lying between Trent and Tweed which had not some charm or beauty to reveal. But when water-power began to be needed, and the rivers and waterfalls were harnessed to machinery, when the demand for coal increased as manufactures developed, vast stretches of a hitherto wild and solitary land became utterly changed in aspect and character, and to-day whoever goes a-wandering after the picturesque had best keep far away from the districts now given up to coal-fields, factories, and workshops. The gloomy industrial regions of the

West Riding of Yorkshire and of South Lancashire, the coal-mining districts of Derbyshire, the ironworks of Lincolnshire, the mines of Durham and Northumberland, the great closely populated towns in which modern needs have blotted out all that was picturesque and of old-world character—these should be sedulously avoided, important as they are from a social and economic standpoint. Fortunately, there are still wide stretches of country in all the northern counties on which the hand of man has not yet been laid with damaging effect. The moors of Yorkshire, Durham, and Northumberland are still given up to solitude; the Lincolnshire, East Yorkshire, and North Yorkshire wolds are still untenanted save by sheep and cattle; the Peak country of Derbyshire is still an expanse of loneliness; the great Yorkshire dales are still unspoilt and their far-apart villages and hamlets are yet as Wordsworth described them, lying deep and low at the foot of the high fells, each

Beneath its little patch of sky  
And little lot of stars.

Solitude, isolation from the busy world, which is, after all, so near—these are, indeed, still the prevalent characteristics of the northern dales, moors, and wolds. Whether amongst the quiet, old-world villages of the long ridge which runs like a rampart between Lincoln and the North Sea, or on the far-reaching moorland that separates Yorkshire from Lancashire, or amidst the solitudes in Northumberland which overshadow Tweed and the Scottish border, a lover of Nature in her silent and lonely moods may still find his every wish gratified and be alone with the goddess of his devotion. And it is not the least charm of these still unspoilt stretches of

Northern England that as far as one can see at present there is nothing to threaten an invasion of their ancient peace. What they are they are likely to remain.

## I

Lincolnshire, amongst people who have never crossed its boundaries, is commonly supposed to be a county of flats and levels. In truth, it is a land of much diversified scenery. In its southern stretches it is certainly as flat as Cambridgeshire. At one part of its neighbourhood to the Trent—about Gainsborough, Scunthorpe, Frodingham—it is as industrial in character as the districts round Newcastle or Middlesbrough. Strictly speaking, it may be divided into fen, marsh, and hill. With the fenland we, here, have no concern—the Fens of Lincolnshire need special description. But east of Lincoln itself, and seen from the towers of its great cathedral as a ridge of low hills rising between the centre of the county and the North Sea, runs a section of country, the Lincolnshire Wolds, which has a character and distinction of its own. Although these hills never attain any considerable height—the highest point is that between Stainton-le-Dale and Walesby, and reaches 530 feet—there are fine views of the surrounding country from certain points along their line. From Pelham Pillar, near Caistor, one may see, over the wooded country around Brocklesby, the long roll of the Humber, with Hull on its farther bank, and the wide sweep of the North Sea, with Spurn Point to the northward and Grimsby and its docks to the east. The slopes of the wolds are thick with old-world villages, and in these villages the chief objects of interest are the churches—Lincolnshire,

however it may compare with the other English counties as regards general attractiveness, need yield to none in respect of its ecclesiastical architecture; few counties can boast of churches like those of Boston, Spalding, Stow, Grantham. Interesting, too, are the small market towns which lie at the foot of these wolds—from Louth at one extremity to Barton-upon-Humber at the other. Typical old English towns, they still retain much of their antiquity, and their parish churches are full of memorials of the past.

To the literary pilgrim the most interesting corner of this Lincolnshire Wold country lies around Somersby, where Alfred Tennyson was born in 1809. Somersby itself is one of the most modest of villages, hiding away amongst the hills with the long ridge of the Wolds behind it, and in front of it a widening valley which eventually stretches towards the flat Lincolnshire coast whose stretches of sand Tennyson so often described. Here, in the old house where he was born, Tennyson spent the whole of his youth, except for the terms he kept at the neighbouring Grammar School of Louth, and the Somersby surroundings of wold, meadow, and sea (for the sea is within easy distance) coloured much of his early, and not a little of his later, poetry. There are bits of pure Lincolnshire scenery all through his work; not the least characteristic are found in various parts of *In Memoriam*, for he and Arthur Hallam had explored every nook and corner of the Somersby district:

I climb the hill: from end to end  
Of all the landscape underneath,  
I find no place that does not breathe  
Some gracious memory of my friend;

## THE NORTH

No grey old grange, or lonely fold,  
Or low morass and whispering reed,  
Or simple stile from mead to mead,  
Or sheepwalk up the windy wold.<sup>1</sup>

At Somersby all Alfred Tennyson's first verses were written. But his brothers, Frederick and Charles, were also gifted in the same way, and in the volume of *Poems by Two Brothers*, published at Louth in 1826, by Jackson, the local bookseller, who gave the authors £20 for the book, of which £10 was to be spent on books selected from his stock, there were contributions by all three. Certain of Alfred's somewhat later productions, published in 1830, were written at Cambridge (he had gone up to Trinity in 1828), but even in his college days Somersby proved an inspiration, and when he invokes the Muse of Memory it is to invite her to come, not from classic haunts, but

from the woods that belt the grey hill-side,  
The seven elms, the poplars four  
That stand beside my father's door,  
And chiefly from the brook that loves  
To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand.<sup>2</sup>

Tennyson's life was to take him far away from Somersby and Lincolnshire, to London, and to Farringford, and to Aldworth, but his early impressions never faded. The influence of the Wold scenery and of the Lincolnshire sea-coast (the Tennyson household was annually removed to Mablethorpe at holiday times) remained with him to the end. So, too, did the influence of the Lincolnshire folk-speech. 'The Northern Farmer', written entirely in the dialect he heard amongst the wold

<sup>1</sup> *In Memoriam. Canto C.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ode to Memory, iv.*

villages, was a comparatively early production, but 'The Village Wife' came late in life, and 'Owd Rōa' still later. If Wordsworth drew his early inspiration from Cumberland, Tennyson drew his in no less degree from the county of which he and Newton and Wesley and Franklin remain the chief notabilities.

## II

Anyone whose sole knowledge of Derbyshire has been gained from a journey along the line of railway which traverses the eastern side of the county, uniting the great towns of the Midlands with those of South Yorkshire, may well be excused for believing it to have fallen a victim to the necessity of developing factories and coal-mines. But he would be resting under a false impression. Away from its industrial district Derbyshire is one of the most beautiful and certainly one of the most interesting counties of Northern England. The variety of its scenery, ranging from the wild solitudes of the Peak to the pastoral beauties of its smaller valleys, is remarkable. It has attractions for the climber, the pedestrian, and the angler, to say nothing of the artist and the photographer. Lovers of solitude will find loneliness enow on the slopes of Kinder Scout and on the wide-stretching moors of the Derbyshire-Yorkshire border; walkers may spend days of delight in its lowlands and uplands; anglers who have the enjoyment of Dove or Derwent will not wonder that Izaak Walton and Charles Cotton found here a fisherman's paradise. Nor should the traveller forget that Derbyshire, like the ancient world, has its Wonders—St. Anne's Well, Poole's Hole, the Ebbing and Flowing Well, Elden Hole, Mam Tor, the Peak Cavern, and Chatsworth House. These,

in uniformity with the Wonders of the World, are Seven, but to the seven two more might well be added in Haddon Hall and the strangely elusive Crooked Spire of Chesterfield.

Dovedale, most charming of the principal Derbyshire dales, and transected by what many judges of fine scenery consider the most beautiful river in England, is best seen by following the course of the Dove from Ashbourne to Hartington. True, a certain expanse of country lies between Ashbourne and the entrance to Dovedale, but Ashbourne should be visited and lingered in because of its fine church (said by George Eliot—the scene of whose novel, *Adam Bede*, is laid hereabouts—to be the finest mere parish church in the Kingdom), its Grammar School, its historic Green Man Inn, and its literary associations with Dr. Johnson and Boswell, who stayed in the town with a famous townsman, Dr. Taylor, in 1776. Ashbourne, too, has associations with Tom Moore, who lived for a while at Mayfield; his well-known poem, ‘Those Evening Bells’, was inspired by the bells of Ashbourne Church. Once outside the little town, a real bit of old England, the cone-shaped hill called Thorpe Cloud, shows where the true entrance to Dovedale lies. Almost at once there are things and places to see and remember—the little Norman Church of Thorpe, the junction of the Manifold with the Dove, and the village of Ilam, beautifully situated in a richly wooded amphitheatre, and notable for possessing in its church one of Chantrey’s finest works. Here again there are literary associations; it was at Ilam that Congreve wrote *The Old Bachelor*. Farther along, the dale narrows, and the limestone rocks begin to show themselves in fantastic shapes. They bear equally fantastic names—

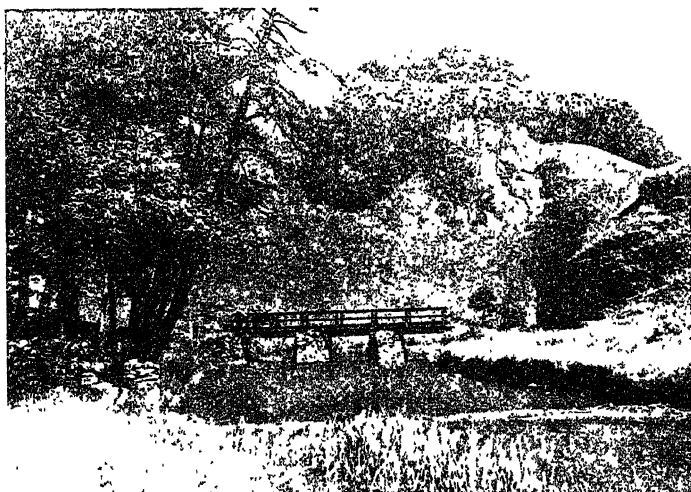


Tissington Spires, Jacob's Ladder, the Twelve Apostles, the Castle, the Lover's Leap; a little beyond these, near the entrance to Sharplow Dale, is an arch in the cliffs known as Reynard's Cave; near it are two caverns called Reynard's Hill and Reynard's Kitchen. Still farther along the Dale, which becomes wilder and narrower the more it advances to the north-west, are more groups of rock, the Lion's Head, Pickering Tor, the Ilam Rock. One is now in the very heart of Dovedale, and he would be a strangely indifferent soul who did not feel its beauty. 'I assure you,' said Byron to Tom Moore, 'there are things in Derbyshire as noble as in Greece or Switzerland.' Byron was not the only enthusiast amongst the literary men—Wordsworth, whose 'Lucy' dwelt 'beside the springs of Dove', Rogers, and Tom Moore all knew and loved these romantic scenes; Gilpin, one of the most keen-sighted of nature lovers, wrote of and pictured them; Eliza Cook, now forgotten, sang sentimentally and enthusiastically of Dove's 'moss-girdled towers' and 'foam-jewelled shingle'. But—to anglers, at any rate—the chief literary association of this wondrous stretch of dale and river centres in Izaak Walton, who used to stay with his friend, Charles Cotton, at Beresford Hall—as all may know who will turn to the second part of *Compleat Angler*.

The Derbyshire Wye, which eventually flows into the Derwent after wandering through one of the most picturesque parts of the county, has its rise near Axe Edge in the wild and mountainous northern extremities beyond Buxton. It passes through a series of dales—Ashwood Dale, Chee Dale, Monsal Dale, Darley Dale, Matlock Dale—and receives tribute from various smaller streams, of which the Lathkill is the most important.



80 LINCOLN: THE CATHEDRAL AND CITY FROM THE WITHAM



81 IN BERESFORD DALE, DERBYSHIRE



82 IN EDALE, DERBYSHIRE

## THE NORTH

From its source to its junction with the Derwent the dale scenery of the Wye is scarcely inferior to that of Dovedale, rock, tree, and river combining to make prospects of rare charm. Buxton, famous as an inland watering-place and health-resort, is, perhaps, not particularly charming; the country surrounding it is of a stern and bleak nature. But Ashwood Dale, with its wealth of foliage, its great cliffs of grey limestone, and its sudden twists and windings, is full of beauty and a fitting threshold to the grander features of Chee Dale, where, at the foot of Chee Tor (400 feet), the valley narrows and becomes wild and romantic. The scenery in Monsal Dale is of a quieter nature, but from the heights above the river there are remarkable views of the surrounding country. Between Monsal Dale and Bakewell is the old-world village of Ashford-in-the-Water, famous for its marble works, but more interesting to the archaeologist because it was one of the last places in which was kept up the old custom of carrying garlands before the coffins of unmarried women and young girls; some of these garlands were, not so many years ago, to be seen suspended in the church. A little farther on, where the dale broadens in its progress towards the valley of the Derwent, lies Bakewell, famous for its puddings (a sort of tart), and a place of great antiquity, as the Saxon cross in its churchyard shows. And two miles beyond Bakewell, on the north bank of the Wye, stands Haddon Hall, perhaps the most picturesque and romantically situated country-house in England, rich in associations with the family of Manners (Dukes of Rutland) and having attached to it a legend concerning one Dorothy Vernon which, if not exactly veracious as it is commonly told, has at least some foundation in fact.

Chatsworth, the palace-like residence of the Dukes of Devonshire, is near this point of the dale, and in the dale itself lies Rowsley, a pretty village owning an ancient and picturesque inn. Hereabouts the scenery is pastoral and the dale wide-spreading. But between Rowsley and Matlock its character changes with startling suddenness, and the traveller finds himself leaving the broad meadows and wooded slopes for a wild and narrow defile, crowned by great limestone crags, sometimes of extraordinary shape. Matlock, indeed, almost as famous as Buxton as a health- and pleasure-resort, is in its way a compendium of dale and river scenery. The winding river, the thick woods, the masses of fantastically shaped cliff, the hills known as the Heights of Abraham and High Tor—these combine to make an amazing picture. Nor are these the only attractions. Matlock is a place of caves, some of them of vast extent. But these are not the only caves in Derbyshire. North of the Wye, the Derwent, the Dove stretches another dale, bordered on the Yorkshire side by wide-stretching moors, wherein, near Castleton, and close to the Peak Castle which Scott wrote about in *Peveril of the Peak*, are caverns even vaster than those at Matlock. Of these the most considerable is the Devil's Cavern, near the Winnats, in Hope Dale, which extends some 800 yards into the interior of the hillside. It is of enormous size within, and once upon a time it was possible for visitors to engage the services of a local choir to sing from some point high up in the roof. Here Byron came with his first serious love, Mary Chaworth, and was rowed about inside the cave in a boat by a ferryman, 'a sort of Charon', but his eyes were all for the object of his affections and of the wonders of the Devil's Cavern he records nothing.



83 KINDERSCOUT, THE HIGHEST POINT OF THE DERBYSHIRE  
PEAK DISTRICT



84 STAINTHORPE IN RIBBLESDALE, YORKSHIRE

## THE NORTH

### III

The greater dales of Yorkshire are as remarkable for the variety of objects and places of interest to be seen in them as for their beauty of scenery. Intersected by rivers, all of which, with the exception of the Ribble (as much a Lancashire as a Yorkshire stream) flow from the Pennine range of mountains to the Ouse in the great central plain called the Vale of York, each presents a multiplicity of attractions to artist and angler, antiquary and archaeologist. Even the valley of the Calder, long since given up to industrialism along the whole of its length, can show matters which range from the sublime in scenery to the rich in association: the upper reaches of the Calder, indeed, before the mills and workshops overspread them, must have been worthy to rank with the finest hill and dale scenery in England. Even now, a wanderer who has climbed to the heights on Blackstone Edge will understand Defoe's feelings when, one wild day, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, with a trembling horse and shivering, frightened dog, made his way through the winter snows over this frowning waste towards the valley and the warmth of Halifax.

The dales best known to the tourist may be catalogued as seven in number—Airedale, Wharfedale, Nidderdale, Wensleydale, Swaledale, Teesdale. But into each of these dales run smaller dales, as, for instance, Malhamdale into Airedale, Littondale into Wharfedale, Coverdale and Garsdale into Wensleydale, and very often there is more beauty and more to see in the tributary dale than in the more famous valley into which it runs. Airedale, for example, at any rate, as regards its lower stretches, has long, like the valley of the Calder, been given up



to industrialism, which is rampant anywhere along the Aire from Castleford to Keighley. Yet on the very edge of Leeds stands all that is left—a great deal, thanks to recent careful restoration—of Kirkstall, one of the greatest and finest of the Cistercian abbeys of Yorkshire, and a little beyond the smoke of Keighley stands Haworth, the home of the Brontës. But to the lover of natural beauty the chief attractions of Airedale are found in Malhamdale, beyond Skipton. The wonderful amphitheatre called Malham Cove, and the terrifying gorge known as Gordale Scar—these are famous the world over, and prove remarkable contrasts to the pastoral scenery in which Airedale terminates as it spreads out towards the Westmorland border.

Wharfedale, most beautiful of all the Yorkshire dales, and worthy to rank with the finest valleys of Westmorland and Cumberland, has nothing of industrialism in its long stretch, once one has passed Otley. Many lovers of this dale reckon its beauties as beginning at Ilkley, and Ilkley is certainly an admirable centre from which to explore Rombald's Moor, stretching for miles and miles on the watershed between Wharfedale and Airedale, and Blubberhouses Moor above the opposite bank of the Wharfe. These are the two finest moorlands in the West Riding. But more precise observers reckon the beauties of Wharfedale proper to begin at Bolton Bridge. Thenceforward, going up the dale, afoot or otherwise, Wharfedale and its brawling river lead through scenes of extraordinary charm and beauty. Something reveals itself with every mile traversed. Bolton Priory ('Abbey' as it is locally but erroneously called) ranks with Fountains and Tintern for loveliness of situation—a grey ruin set on a green sward in the bend of a swirling

river—and Barden Tower, set high above the Wharfe, looks over an expanse of wood, hill, and moorland whose impressiveness it would be difficult to surpass. Then come the dale villages, set far enough apart to give to each an aspect of solitude. Appletreewick, whence sprang the village boy who became Sir William Craven and whose son married the Queen of Bohemia, sister of our Charles I, and was created first Earl of Craven; Burnsall, notable for its fine old church and great bridge; Linton, Threshfield, Grassington, Hebden—all these out-of-the-world places have charms of their own and are worth lingering in. And as the traveller goes farther along the Dale its beauty increases. Just before reaching the point where Littondale falls into Wharfedale, the gigantic mass of limestone called Kilnsey Crag overhangs the road and the river, and reminds those who have seen the Great Orme and its precipitous cliffs of that rampart of the North Welsh coast. A little farther along and the traveller must choose between two routes; his best solution of that difficulty is to follow both, on alternate days. One, going to the left through Littondale, takes him through Arncliffe (a most engaging and picturesque village, beautifully situated and boasting a fine church set on the bank of the river) and Litton to Halton Gill, whence by a mountain track he may climb the moorlands until he is well over 2,000 feet high and finds himself on the slopes of Pen-y-Ghent, with views on either hand which cover a vast expanse of country. If he keeps to the main road of Wharfedale, passing through the villages of Kettlewell and Buckden, he will again be faced with an alternative. Just beyond Buckden a road to the right will take him, always climbing, over the hills and moors to Wensleydale and Aysgarth; a

narrow lane to the left will lead him to the tiny hamlet of Hubberholme and its ancient church, wherein is a wood-loft dating from the middle of the sixteenth century, and on to Beckermonds, where he will find himself in the midst of a wonderful solitude and see the Wharfe reduced to a tiny stream. And here, again turning to the right, he may follow a mountain road, through Oughtershaw, a truly solitary hamlet set in a romantic defile, to the great moorland lying at a height of over 2,000 feet between Wharfedale and Wensleydale, and from the highest peak of it, amidst a silence only broken by the mountain sheep and the mountain birds, look out on what seems to be half the kingdoms of the world.

Nidderdale, like Wharfedale, need not be traversed for the whole length of the river from which it derives its name. One of its most enthusiastic admirers and topographers has called it the 'Rhineland of England', and from Knaresborough to its source near Middlesmoor it merits the title. Knaresborough, of course, is a show-place; its nearness to Harrogate brings to it every season thousands of the curious who want to see the famous Dropping Well, Mother Shipton's Cave, St. Robert's Chapel, and the scenes connected with that amiable and scholarly murderer, Eugene Aram. Certainly Knaresborough is one of the most interesting and historic places in Yorkshire, and its situation on the banks of the Nidd is as romantic as a German castle on the Rhine. But the charms of Nidderdale proper begin at Pateley Bridge, some miles farther on, where the Nidd is enclosed between narrowing uplands, and as it nears its source is lost in some of the wildest moorland scenery in the county. Above Pateley Bridge, and a little beyond Greenhow Hill, the caverns of Stump Cross are found in the midst

of a vast expanse of moor which stretches north and west towards Wharfedale and Ingleborough; here, at Keld Houses, one is at the highest populated place in Yorkshire. Down in the dale beneath these wildernesses of ling and heather, and between Pateley Bridge and Rams-gill, lies one of the great Nidderdale reservoirs which supply Bradford with water, but it has been so skilfully engineered and contrived that were it not for the big castellated dam at its eastern end one would take it for a natural lake. Beyond it the dale continues to narrow and to increase in charm. Near Lofthouse one comes to one of its principal beauty-spots—the gorge of How Stean, which, if not as awe-inspiring or of the same magnitude as the canyons of Colorado, is the most remarkable specimen of such scenery in Yorkshire. Here the streams which pour down from the slopes of Whernside rush through a ravine which at certain parts is nearly a hundred feet in depth, its walls thickly hung with fern, moss, flowers, trees. Romantic and picturesque at all times, this ravine should be seen when the rivers are in flood—it then becomes awe-inspiring. Awe-inspiring, too, is the cavern in the moors above the hill-village of Middlesmoor, known by the name of Goyden Pot, a natural cavity, entered by an arch measuring some 12 by 9 feet, but said to extend into the mountain side to a depth—or length—of two miles. Here one is near the source of the river Nidd, which, as a river, has the peculiarity of disappearing into the earth at one place, pursuing a subterranean career for a mile or two, and then reappearing freshened and increased in force.

Wensleydale, ranked by many lovers of dale scenery before Wharfedale, and certainly one of the most beautiful valleys in England, begins strictly speaking, at the

delightfully situated village of Wensley, but most people who explore it have previously come through its southern extremity, Uredale, in a tributary of which, Skeldale, stands the finest and most impressive monastic ruin in the county, the great Cistercian Abbey of Fountains. Uredale is a wide-spreading valley, with the River Ure winding through purely pastoral scenes by many historic towns, villages, and remains of a former age—Ripon, with its ancient minster and its many old houses and vestiges of medievalism; Tanfield with its Marmion Tower and church full of fine monuments; Masham, notable for its remarkable market square; Middleham, where the castle of Warwick the King-Maker still stands, a formidable though ruinous mass overlooking the valley; Leyburn, a true specimen of the old dale market town. At Wensley, the dale narrows and becomes even more charming and picturesque as it penetrates the surrounding hills. In the old church of Wensley there is much to see, including parts of the old choir-stalls of Easby Abbey, and a family pew of the now extinct Dukes of Bolton. A little way westward, on the north bank of the river, stands the still well-preserved castle of Bolton, where Mary Queen of Scots spent the first years of her captivity in England, and from whence she made an attempt to escape. More interesting small towns and villages follow—Askrigg, where there are fine old houses and a remarkably impressive church; Aysgarth, famous for its waterfalls; Bainbridge, near which is the mountain lake called Semmer Water; and Hawes, from which one may turn aside to see the famous Butter Tubs, curious cavities in the ground on the way from Wensleydale to Swaledale across the solitary moors. Beyond Hawes, Wensleydale proper runs into a smaller, less celebrated,

but scarcely less beautiful valley called Garsdale; and on the other side of the hills southward from Garsdale is the romantic Dent Dale, made celebrated by Robert Southey in his book, *The Doctor*. Both these dales run towards Sedbergh, one of the last towns in Yorkshire, notable for its parish church and its well-known school, and resting amidst wonderful hill-scenery on the threshold of Westmorland and the Lake District. Few drives or walks in England are superior in beauty and interest than can be had along the road between Ripon and Sedbergh through Uredale, Wensleydale, and Garsdale.

The lower stretches of Swaledale, from the junction of the Swale with the Ure near Aldborough, are flat and uninteresting, except to people concerned in agriculture, though here and there one comes across villages, such as Catterick, which possess historic interest. The real beauty of Swaledale begins at Easby Abbey, a little to the south-east of Richmond, where there is a combination of wood, river, and monastic ruin, romantically situated, which is only surpassed by the somewhat similar situation at Bolton Priory. Henceforward Swaledale is a region of delight, instinct with a character of its own. Few towns in England, if any, form such a striking picture as Richmond presents, seen from the river-banks near Easby. Turner asserted this to be one of the finest views in Europe. The old town, dominated by the massive keep of its great Norman castle, crowns the spur of a sharply defined promontory at the foot of which winds the Swale, here a brawling stream whose murmur never ceases. Richmond, seen from within, is quickly recognized as one of the last bits of Old England: its castle, its old church in the market square, its Friars' Wynd, its Grey Friars' Tower, its queer, quaint nooks

and corners, its altogether dead-centuries aspect are unique; there is no other town in England that one can class with it. It forms a perfect sentinel to the dale beyond, which, the farther it recedes into the wild country near the Westmorland border becomes more and more characteristic of its qualities of solitude and isolation. Places are far apart here—there is little population in the scattered villages and hamlets and the farmsteads on the moors on either side the valley are far removed from each other. Yet there are places to see and linger in—Marrick and Ellerton, with their monastic ruins; Grinton, remarkable for its fine old church, locally termed the ‘Cathedral of the Dales’; Reeth, perched high on a bluff which overlooks Arkengarthdale; Ivelet, where peppercorn rents are still in force; Gunnerside, from whence the inquisitive in such things may examine all that remains of the old Gang Mines, from which lead used to be extracted in quantity; the falls of Swinnergill and Kisdon; Muker, an excellent centre from which to turn south for the moors between Swaledale and Wensleydale, and Keld, where one comes to the end of Swaledale and, apparently, to the end of the world. Beyond this is nothing—except moors, rocks, hills, and the almost unbroken solitudes amongst which lie the borders of Yorkshire and Westmorland.

Just as one should begin the exploration of Swaledale at Easby Abbey, so one should set out for a tour of Teesdale at Greta Bridge. Here one is at once in touch with literary associations. At the old inn near the bridge Charles Dickens stayed while he was collecting the material for *Nicholas Nickleby*; in one of its rooms he entertained to supper the Teesdale farmer who became the original of John Browdie in that novel; an educational



85 THE PENNINE MOORS LOOKING TO INGLEBOROUGH HILL, YORKSHIRE





86 AUTUMN AT GRASMERE, WESTMORLAND



87 ALSTON, IN THE CUMBERLAND PENNINES: THE HIGHEST  
MARKET-TOWN IN ENGLAND

## THE NORTH

establishment in the neighbourhood gave him his idea—a somewhat erroneous one—of Dotheboys Hall. At Rokeby, close by, Sir Walter Scott was the frequent guest of his friend Morritt, and there he wrote a considerable part of the poem which takes its name from the place, and in which he celebrates such scenes of riverside beauty as Brignall Banks and the scenery amidst which Greta and Tees meet beneath the medieval pile called Mortham Tower. From Greta Bridge one may conveniently make pilgrimage to the wilds of Stainmore, a widespreading expanse between Teesdale and Westmorland and the scene of the old folk-lore legend of the Hand of Glory. All this part of Teesdale is full of romance and history. On the way from Greta Bridge towards Barnard Castle one passes Eggleston Abbey, a striking monastic ruin set high above the river; a mile or two farther along one sees, across the river and therefore in Durham, the still considerable pile of Barnard Castle perched on a promontory overhanging the brawling waters beneath. Thence, going north-east, the scenery becomes wilder as one approaches Middleton-in-Teesdale, by way of old-world villages like Cotherstone, famous for its cheese; Lartington, Romaldkirk, each on the edge of the high fells and bare moors; and comes, beyond Middleton, a quiet little town lying in a thickly wooded hollow, to the solitudes amidst which is hidden the waterfall known as High Force, most impressive scene of its nature in Yorkshire. Here the waters, rushing down from the moors above, pour in mighty volume over a great precipice. Above this the moors become wilder and lonelier, and the traveller, climbing higher and higher across them, finds himself at last in the midst of an absolute solitude, looking his last on

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

Yorkshire and contemplating, in the distance, the great ramparts of the Cumberland hills.

There are dales and moors in the North Riding of Yorkshire, between the Vale of York and the Cleveland Hills, which if not so expansive nor so beautiful as those of the West Riding, have a plentitude of charm. From the high ground above Rievaulx Abbey one sees these dales spreading away like the spokes from the hub of a cart-wheel. Of the situation of Rievaulx itself, one of our greatest authorities on topography, the late J. E. Morris, says that no other ruined abbey in the kingdom is at once so beautiful in itself nor so beautifully placed. But there are many beautiful places on these North York Moors and in the little dales which cut through them—Helmsley, Lastingham, Kirby Moorside, the valley between Pickering and Goathland, and the districts round Danby, made famous by the late Canon Atkinson's well-known book, *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish*. The Cleveland and Hambleton Hills and the moors which lie amongst them, are indeed as notable a feature of fine Yorkshire scenery as the hills and dales of the West Riding, and in comparison with them the Wolds of the East Riding seem tame and featureless, though they too have their charms and their special features and can show some alluring scenery, as at Holme-on-Spalding Moor, and from the heights above Sledmere.

## IV

Northumberland and Durham, like Derbyshire and Yorkshire, have their industrial districts—coal-fields, ship-building and shipping areas, grim towns and sombre and sometimes squalid villages, and in each case they

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are on the sea-coast sides of the two counties. Fortunately they are confined to comparatively small and well-defined districts, and if Northumberland is best avoided in the Tyne area, its sea-coast northward of Coquet Island is, perhaps, the finest and most romantic in the country. And for fell and moorland scenery, stretching from the Durham moors through the west side of Northumberland to the Cheviots and round by the Tweed to Berwick, one cannot express too lavish praise; it is strange that this triangle of wonderful beauty is not better known and more visited by home-keeping tourists. From the Yorkshire border through Stanhope Common and Allendale to Carter Fell, and thence north-east to Berwick, the scenery is of extreme charm and variety, and as one nears the Tweed is full of romantic association. On the southern edge of Northumberland lies its most beautiful town, Hexham, with its great abbey church dating from Saxon times, its fine old-world market-place, and its charm of situation on the banks of the Tyne. The abbey church has now been restored and modernized—without spoiling its distinctive features—and ranks with the finest in England. Some twelve miles away across the fells and moors there is another interesting relic of antiquity in the ruins of Blanchland, set amidst appealing scenery. This is south of Hexham; a little to the northward of St. Wilfrid's old town one comes across Chesters, where the Roman Wall is seen to advantage, stretching away over the undulating country, east towards Newcastle, west towards Cumberland. This massive fortification, extending across Northumbria from the Tyne to the Solway is, of course, unique, and Chesters forms one of the best centres for its exploration.

Amongst these Northumbrian moors and dales lie the

scènes of two of the most famous battles of the olden days—Otterburn and Flodden. Readers of our old ballad literature are familiar enough with the story of Otterburn as represented in the version which is most commonly known and tells how the Scots under Douglas and the English under Percy met and fought at Otterburn ‘about the breaking of the day’ and how Earl Douglas was buried amidst the bracken near which he fell while Percy was led away to captivity. Froissart, giving an account of this fight, says that there was ‘no playe nor sparynge’, and Godscroft estimated the number of slain at well over 2,500. Round about the modern Otterburn, a quiet, trim little village nowadays, these dead warriors lie; on the side of the village nearest to Scotland stands Percy’s Cross—an obelisk which, according to a local historian is an old architrave taken from the fireplace of the kitchen at Otterburn Hall. Ancient or modern, it marks the scene of an event still sung about in the lonely farmsteads of the Border.

Otterburn was a Scottish victory, but the equally famous fight at Flodden, still nearer the Tweed and the Border, went in favour of the English. The actual scene of the battle was on Branxton Hill, where the Scottish army came after crossing the Tweed at Coldstream, to encounter the English force under Surrey which had advanced northward after assembling at Pontefract. On the spot at which the Scottish King (James IV) fell is a monument erected in recent years ‘to the brave of both nations’. With the King fell thirteen earls, fourteen peers of lesser degree, an archbishop, a bishop, two abbots, together with knights and gentlemen. ‘So numerous,’ says Hume Brown,<sup>1</sup> ‘that there was scarcely

<sup>1</sup> *History of Scotland*, Vol. 1, p. 272.

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a family of consequence in Scotland that had not occasion to remember the folly of the King.' Hence the well-known ballad, familiar to Scotsmen the world over:

Dool and wae for the order sent our lads to the Border,  
The English for aince by guile wan the day:  
The Flowers of the Forest that fought aye the foremost,  
The prime of our land are cauld in the clay.

We'll hear nae mair lilting at the ewe-milking,  
Women and bairns are heartless and wae,  
Sighing and moaning on ilka green loaning,  
The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

But all this is of 'unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago'. The Northumbrian fells, moors, valleys are peaceful enough now, and where the country-folk of other days looked on armed men issuing from the embattled walls of Norham and Wedderburn, their successors of to-day see only the Tweed, gliding away towards Berwick and the sea, and beyond the Tweed the smiling, placid acres of the Scottish Lowlands.

Will F. Taylor

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THE  
NORTH:  
MOUNTAINS, LAKES AND FELLS

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THE northern half of England is dominated by the Pennine highlands, a tumbled mass of moorland making a massive divide of the country north of the Trent. Climb up from Northern Yorkshire over the miles of moors past Bowes and suddenly, on Stainmoor, the road sweeps round, and 1,000 feet below you is the different land of Cumbria, probably the most definitely bounded of all the English regions. To your right is the steep edge of the Pennines, here facing west with an unbroken range 2,000 feet or more in height for a distance of thirty miles, a mountain wall without parallel in Britain and crossed by only one road in the last twenty-five miles. Cumbria lies between these Pennines on the east and the sea on the west, and between the Solway on the north and Morecambe Bay on the south, definite borders strengthened as they are by the Solway rivers,

and in the olden days by dense woodland at the head of Morecambe Bay. So cut off is Cumbria from England to the east and south that it was looked on as a natural unit of Scotland until late Norman times, and the Key stone on Stainmore was then the boundary between the lands of the English and Scottish kings, as it still is between Cumbria and Eastern England.

Cumbria, too, is a region of a marked racial character. It is a solid block of Scandinavian predominance; everywhere in it place-names of this origin are a great majority. The Eden Valley and the coast-lands seem to have been colonized by Anglians filtering over into it from the Tyne and Tees Valleys, after they had well established themselves there. But Cumbria's central highland, the Lake District dales and fells, remained empty, or nearly so, until it was peopled by the last of the great British immigrations, perhaps the most romantic of all. This was due to the wanderings and settlements of the Norse Vikings, which took them to Iceland and even America, and, in Britain, to the occupation of the Orkneys and Shetlands and much of Western Scotland. Sailing along the Cumbrian coast in the tenth century, the Viking boats brought the Norse to the fells, which seen from the sea perhaps promised pasture for their sheep like to that of their Norwegian homes. The Vikings took complete possession of what is now called the Lake District; nearly all the place-names there are Norse. *Dale* and *fell*, *dodd* (a subsidiary fell), *force* (a waterfall), *thwaite* (cleared ground), and *tarn* from the Norse *tiorn* (a tear), all remind one that 900 years ago the dweller in Lakeland was more closely linked with the Shetlands, Norway, or Iceland than with London.

It is perhaps fair to mention a later immigrant. The



silver-faced Hardwick sheep, thick coated and hardy to the heavy rainfall, the special breed of the district, is said to be the descendant of a small flock saved from a Spanish Armada wreck, but possibly, one's fancy suggests, it too may be a Viking remnant.

Western Cumbria centres around the mountain mass which culminates in Sca Fell and Sca Fell Pike, the latter 3,210 feet high and the loftiest peak in England. To the geologist the region is a domed uplift of the earth's crust which has exposed the oldest and hardest rocks in the centre. From the centre of the dome the running waters cut dales for themselves, and these radiate, like spokes of a wheel, as Wordsworth said, from the mountain knot round the Sca Fell crests. The final modelling came when the district (by then in main outline as it is now, so recent geologically is this magical change of climate) was sheeted thick with the ice of glaciers. These, with the slow might of moving ice, cut into the valley floors, and when the warmer millenniums came there were in some places deeper hollows. In these hollows, or where the glacier debris had dammed the valley, the waters collected, and the solitary lakes mirrored the lonely hills. The final touch came with the patient labour and the homely dwellings of a race of sturdy dalesmen, who, during centuries of isolation, made a localized simple civilization into which penetrated the outer world, following the footsteps of the poets Gray and Wordsworth. The 'picturesque and romantic' became fashionable and 'The English Lakes' as a region of rest, play, and thought came to life. Is it just chance that the romantic appreciation of wild nature grew step by step as the machine grew as an agent of industrial wealth in the later eighteenth century? Now that the machine is

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also the chief servant of pleasure it looms as dangerous to the sense of true values in this field as it is in the factory.

The perfect balance of man and nature that Wordsworth found has gone. Can we of to-day hold back the fierce onslaught of a petrol-driven age and save the rich compact gem, for it is still in the main that, of natural beauty which the dales and fells of a few miles breadth still hold. Surely if any district deserves to be a National Reserve of peace it is this inner circle. Something has been done by the rapidly multiplying areas held by the National Trust, but broader power is needed, as is brought home by the suggestion made last year by the Cumberland County Surveyor that a motor-road over the Styhead Pass could be made a 'paying proposition'. No country with a reasonable plan for its future would drive its machines through a mountain sanctuary.

The geographical centre of Lakeland is the little nook of Grasmere, no longer quite with the repose that Gray found in 'this little unsuspected paradise', but still with the untouched fells for walls and skyline. If from one side of Rydal Water come the thunder of coaches from Lancashire or Yorkshire (Grasmere is a day trip from the industrial north), yet on the other side are the paths of Loughrigg Terrace with that wealth of varied detail of rock, grass, and fern which is so characteristic of Lakeland. The whole landscape is in scale with an exquisite balance. Go, too, up the adjoining valley of Great Langdale, over which the Langdale Pikes tower with majesty astounding for their height of under 3,000 feet. But on the meadow floor at the head of the dale we are only about 300 feet above the sea, so that it is not surprising that the fells take on a further grandeur.

It is this companionship of low and habitable dale with real mountain crag, small though the scale may be, which gives Lakeland its intimacy and variety of appeal. The cragsman, too, will find on the fell-tops climbing to test every power, and yet be but an hour from a comfortable inn. There is none of the long, weary tramp which in some highland districts is necessary to get to the crags and the real climb. For a brief epitome of Lakeland beauty, leave the spacious and park-like landscape of Windermere and go by the Langdale Road, past the little water-meadows where the Brathay runs still both below Skelwith Force and above from the reed-set Elterwater, surrounded by little grass fields and groups of trees, and backed by the higher fells, and in a few miles you are in the different world of Upper Langdale ringed round with mountains 2,000 feet above you.

Grasmere is the literary centre of Cumbria. Here Wordsworth did most of his greater work in tiny Dove Cottage and here he rests in Grasmere churchyard. He came to Dove Cottage in 1799, and a year later Coleridge and Southey settled at Keswick about twenty miles away over the low pass of Dunmail Raise. Coleridge did not stay long in Lakeland, but Southey lived in Keswick until his death in 1843. De Quincey lived at Dove Cottage after Wordsworth moved to other Grasmere houses. Scott, Keats, Shelley, and even that devoted Londoner Charles Lamb, all visited the district in that sudden burst of its literary popularity. Thomas Gray had led the way when he toured here in 1767, but it sounds quaint to read that he dared not venture into Borrowdale beyond Grange, as even the rocks above Lodore had seemed ready to thunder on to his head. His note that at Penrith he 'dined with Mrs. Buckden

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on trout and partridges' is a more domestic touch which leads one to add here that the standard of cooking and comfort in Lakeland hotels, even the smaller ones, is pleasantly high, and compared with other parts of England you will find that often an hotel has been owned by the same family for some generations and the tradition of hospitality remains. Defoe had come to Cumbria before Gray, but shunned the 'inhospitable terror' and 'terrible aspect of the hills'. He toured to survey industry and was more interested in the Kendal broadcloths than in crag and fell.

There is no better place from which to get a broad idea of the structure of Lakeland than Castle Head, standing out abruptly above the lower ground at the end of Derwentwater. It is a plug of harder rock, probably the hardened throat of one of the volcanoes which erupted the material to make the mountains which culminate in Scafell, Bowfell, and Great Gable. These as seen from Castle Head rise in a broken mass in the south beyond the head of Derwentwater. Of the three sections of Lakeland it is this which rises to the greatest height and has certainly the greatest variety and beauty.

To the north of Derwentwater is the second mountain section, dominated by Skiddaw, closely flanked by Blencathra. These mountains of softer slate contrast in smooth massive outline with the broken rocky peaks of the volcanic group. There is a delicate power in the lines which Skiddaw draws in the sky above the lakes of Derwentwater and Bassenthwaite, the latter being specially the attendant daughter of Skiddaw. It seems that Skiddaw was the earliest mountain in Lakeland to be climbed for its view; Bishop Nicholson went up it in 1684. It dominates the wide spread of the Solway, with

the Scotch Lowland mountains beyond. So simple is the walk up that it amuses one to read of the eighteenth-century wanderer who found there 'chasms of enormous depths in the bowels of the mountains yawning upwards with frightful grin'. The third section of Lakeland is to the east of Thirlmere and the trunk road which crosses Dunmail Raise. Helvellyn (3,118 feet) and Great Dodd (2,804 feet) are the two peaks which stand out above this transverse valley.

Derwentwater, with richly wooded shores, lies a placid queen among the heights. A tablet on Friar's Crag, a pine-set rock jutting into the waters near Keswick, records the words of John Ruskin that 'the first thing which I remember as an event in life was being taken by a nurse to the brow of Friar's Crag on Derwentwater'. Till his death beside the waters of Conistone, Ruskin remained a dalesman in heart. The lake is fed with clear waters from the rainiest region in England, emerging through the delicious green of the Jaws of Borrowdale, and past the perfect group at Grange of old bridge, cottages, and trees. Borrowdale itself is the grand antechamber of the higher fells, walled round with Great Gable, Great End, and Glaramara. One foot pass goes over Styhead to the wilder vale of Wasdale, where Scafell stands at one end of Wastwater, and into the other plunge the stupendous slopes of the Screes. Borrowdale, Wasdale, and Langdale are the great dale entries into the heart of central Lakeland. Eskdale is a solitary and little-touched sanctuary, also bedded in the Scafell crags. The main heights of these mountains are now in National hands as they have been dedicated as the War Memorial of the Fellsmen. The climbers' craft has grown in the past fifty years to a science which delights



88 THE SNOW-STREAKED SUMMITS OF THE LAKELAND FELLS, NEAR KENDAL, WESTMORLAND



89 A LAKELAND FARM NEAR LOWESWATER, CUMBERLAND

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to find new ways of scaling the well-known peaks and rocks.

Another track from Borrowdale, now unfortunately being 'improved' into a better motor-road, climbs beneath the Honister Craggs to Buttermere. It is hoped that one of the latest plans of the National Trust will keep this valley what it is now, probably the quietest and most secret haunt of the Lakeland spirit of beauty. The three little lakes of Loweswater, Crummock Water, and Buttermere mirror the fells in quiet transition from the pastoral lands at the lower end to the majestic slopes of Red Pike and High Stile.

The third section of Lakeland is reached from the head of Lake Windermere by the well-known climb up the Kirkstone Pass, then down past Brothers' Water and through Patterdale to Ullswater, which some consider the finest of the Lakeland waters. It is best seen from Gowbarrow Park, from whence stately Ullswater bends gently past the shores where Wordsworth saw 'the host of golden daffodils' to the wooded rocks of Stybarrow at the head, round which cluster closely the higher fells leading up to Fairfield and Helvellyn.

The southern shores of the lake are mainly roadless, and here Martindale harbours the only northern English herd of the wild red deer, roaming the fells between Ullswater and Haweswater, the latter soon to be spoilt by the Manchester Waterworks. The worst damage will be done by the tame cloak of conifers with which the water engineer conceals the exquisite detail of the Lakeland fell. Conifers are quite alien to Lakeland, as Wordsworth said, and when planted in mass as round Thirlmere, or as by the Forestry Commissioners in Ennerdale, they definitely spoil the landscape.



The borders of Lakeland vary greatly on the different sides. Windermere, the largest English Lake, is itself hardly in the true Lake District, as only its head touches the mountain area. The major part is in Furness Fells, and thus in that county of Lancashire which is usually credited with being merely a collection of smoky chimneys, though it includes this most delightful annexe to Lakeland. The eastern shores of Windermere have been freely sprinkled with the villas of the well-to-do, but the western are almost untouched woodland. Almost parallel with Windermere is the lake of Coniston, where Ruskin lived, and between the two, and close beside the little Esthwaite Water, is Hawkshead, a townlet dominated by the church on its green hill, like a 'throned lady.'

The dense woods on either side of Windermere spread over among little-known valleys. The furnaces these woods fed for centuries are now stocked with coal, to smelt the iron now found on the seaward fringe, where Barrow in Furness smokes the sky.

Circling the Lakelands from here, as the clock moves, we come to the valley of the Duddon, pictured in the accurate sonnet sequence of Wordsworth, then to little-known Eskdale, better known Wasdale, and much less known Ennerdale, where we reach the black country of west Cumberland. But beyond Maryport the coal and iron is left behind and the Solway shores look quietly across the firth to the granite height of Criffel, queen of the Galloway coast.

Between the Solway and the mountains it is simple agricultural country, rising quietly to the slopes of Skiddaw and Blencathra, where John Peel blew his horn to good purpose both for present pleasure and future

fame. Nearer Carlisle was once Westwood Forest, joined on to Inglewood Forest athwart the road from Penrith to Carlisle. This is now a rather featureless highway through which the modern car sets its best pace along the widest racing track in Cumbria. As for Carlisle, a devoted Cumbrian has said that the city is 'a very delightful place when you see it with the eye of faith', and the stranger may perhaps leave it at that! He may think that half a mile of London Road and Botcher-gate, the usual entrance, requires a faith well fed on the fells he has left behind. But the huge eastern window of the cathedral has exquisite tracery of the culminating epoch of English Gothic art.

Near Carlisle meet the rivers draining the Eden Valley and the Scottish Border, and the city was thus a natural focus of life, and, in olden days, a fortress against the Scot. Its historical memories are many. Cumbria's history, in the text-book sense, closed when Prince Charlie's army fled north after its defeat in the last battle on English soil, at Clifton near Penrith. The Roman barrier runs north of Carlisle from Bowness on the Sol-way, and thence along the higher ground on the north of the River Irthing; and at Birdoswald is the only considerable fort before it crosses the Northumbrian divide. Beside the Irthing, and set behind a green meadow, is the abbey of Lanercost, whose bold Transitional west front has seen stirring times of Border war, and looked down on Scottish and English kings. From here a singularly bold and light medieval bridge crosses the river to Naworth Castle, the stronghold of the Howard family, where lived Lord William Howard, 'Bauld Willie' as he was called, or, 'Belted Will' more romantically by Walter Scott.

Besides Lanercost, the monastic settlements of Cumbria were Furness Abbey, the greatest of all, in the south-west, still a stately ruin; its affiliated abbey of Calder farther north on the coast; the priory of Cartmel, where the fine church remains intact; and the Premonstratensian abbey of Shap, of which only the riven tower remains. To the church archaeologist Cumbria has little to offer beyond these few monastic churches. It was a district which, save for border warfare, lay very much apart from British history, the Lakeland especially being an isolated area where the yeoman, or 'statesman', to use the local title, lived his own life. Perhaps the most fascinating relics of the region are the crosses at Gosforth and Bewcastle. The first is carved with the strangest mixture of pagan and Viking myth and Christian symbol. That at Bewcastle, in the lonely spaces near the Scottish Border, is carved in the tradition of Byzantine craft with a strength of design and power of execution, which prove a close link with the distant Bosphorus, perhaps by the Viking trade routes to the Black Sea by Russia. So wide did the Norseman wander from Constantinople to Iceland and the Cumbrian fells. This work of exquisite art stands in the most remote of Cumbrian villages, a few houses in a hollow among many miles of lonely country rising to Christianbury Crag, on the Northumbrian border and looking across the Clattering Ford to Liddisdale of the Scots.

The great lay rulers of Cumbria tend to have gathered around Penrith, to the west of which is Dacre, where the family of that name lived originally: they also built Naworth, and both passed in the female line to the Howards. To the east of Penrith is Brougham Castle, still a stately ruin beside the River Eamont. Here ruled



90 DERWENTWATER, LOOKING TO GRASMOOR, CUMBERLAND



91 BLEA TARN IN THE LAKE DISTRICT, WESTMORLAND

## THE NORTH

the Cliffords, supreme in Westmorland as the Dacres in Cumberland. The family ended with the famous Countess Anne Pembroke, who was equally brusque in claiming her rights against both Cromwell and King Charles. Also near Penrith now lives Cumbria's undoubted lord of the land, that typical Englishman of Lowther Castle who looks back to so distant an ancestry that perhaps the river below the castle is named after the lord rather than the lord after the river. There was a Lowther of Lowther before the Conquest, at least so says the present Earl. Incidentally it may be stated here that it is said that some of the present yeoman families of Borrowdale are said to be as old established on their lands.

This concentration of the lords of the land around Penrith is the natural expression of its central position between the Cumberland fells and the rich farmlands of the Eden Lowland, two very different districts. The one is perhaps the most famous of the English tourist regions, the other is very little known to the stranger. This wide valley, with its warm red soil, is an isolated area of arable farming dignified by the unbroken wall of the Pennine slopes rising to the east—the most impressive, physical feature in England, it has been rightly called.

The lower half is Cumberland territory, and here the full river runs beside the pleasant villages of Langwathby, Lazonby, Kirkoswald, and Armthwaite, away from the bustle of the great trunk roads. Appleby, one of the pleasantest of county towns, is the centre of the Westmorland section. Farther up, the valley grows barer and mountains gather on all sides. The windswept village of Brough commands the Stainmore exit from Cumbria.

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

Through Kirkby Stephen a road goes up the narrow valley of Mallerstang, beneath the shadow of Wild Boar Fell, to the Yorkshire Wensley Dale. Another road climbs from Kirkby Stephen over the neck of heights which are the link between the Pennines and the Lakeland fells, and the southern slopes of this neck are drained by the Lune running down a beautiful valley, of which the mountain walls have something of Lakeland delicacy together with the broader Pennine sweeps, to Kirkby Lonsdale, where the waters leave Cumbria as they run below the masterly arches of the 550 years old Devil's Bridge.



92 PLOUGHING IN THE EDEN VALLEY, CUMBERLAND



93 RYDAL VALE IN THE LAKE DISTRICT, WESTMORLAND





94 THE YARROW ABOVE ST. MARY'S LOCH, SELKIRKSHIRE

George Blake

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LOWLAND SCOTLAND:  
*THE BORDERS AND THE SOUTHERN  
UPLANDS*

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‘YE Hielans and ye Lowlands,’ sang the ancient balladist, mourning the death of the Bonnie Earl o’ Moray, ‘Oh, where have you been?’—a pretty apostrophe that makes a definition which has been the bane of everybody interested in Scottish topography for generations past. For where on earth do the Lowlands end and the Highlands begin?

No straight line drawn on the map could possibly mark the frontier. It is not a matter of latitude or longitude, of high land or low land. It could be argued, for instance, that the extreme northerly county of Caithness is almost pure Lowland in character; it is a fact that the hill called Merrick, in the extreme south of the country, rises to a height not far short of those of the acknowledged giants of Argyll and Inverness and Ross. In the mainly industrial county of Lanark are shepherd’s

cottages as remote as any croft or shieling of Sutherland; at Kinlochleven, under the harsh mountains of Rannoch and Lochaber, you will come on an aluminium factory belching smoke. They speak the Gaelic at Inveraray but not at Elgin, which lies far to the north. It is easier for the citizen of the grey industrial community of Glasgow to reach the heart of the true Highlands than it is for the resident in granite Aberdeen.

The distinction, however, is not one with which any native Scot has much difficulty. Waking at dawn in a sleeping-car that had set out from Euston or King's Cross the night before, he could poke his head out of the window and say of the country streaming past, high country or low country, that it was definitely Highland or definitely Lowland. Set him down at the first wayside station and the matter would be settled, for from the speech and the deportment of the local porter he would know very nearly where he was.

This Highland-Lowland distinction, then, is partly racial and partly scenic, and the map cannot help us much. He would be a clod who could not distinguish between the Highland and the Lowland sub-species of the Scottish race, but far, far subtler are the nuances of that ravishing amalgam of contour and mass, light and shade, colour and atmosphere, vegetation and prevailing wind and gathered water, we call scenery. And our business here is mainly with scenery; so let us now try to see how the scenery of the Lowlands has, for all its infinite varieties, a character of its own and a charm that is apt to be overlooked in comparison with the more theatrical splendours the Highlands can provide.

Not that everything in the Lowlands is particularly worth looking at. There is the area, lying roughly

## LOWLAND SCOTLAND

between Edinburgh and Glasgow, that is blasted by the workings of industrialism and is like everything else of the sort, whether in the Black Country of Warwickshire or in the Colne Valley or in the Saar. Just one thing is worth noting: that near to every blasted heath of Scotland's iron and coal-belt is some charming relic of the country as it was in its natural state. One of the few herds of white cattle in Britain roams in Cadzow Forest, ringed round by coal-bings. Above the clangour of Greenock's shipyards stretch mile upon mile of golden moorland. And about many of these black patches lie leagues of farming country, pleasant enough in a rolling pastoral way but not so distinguished as to impress the travelling eye.

Lacking the association with Burns, it is doubtful if mid-Ayrshire would see many tourists in any year. There are leagues of the Lothians, Fife, Angus, and Aberdeen that are just nice, fat agricultural regions, charming enough but notable only in the eyes of patriotism or in respect of some local curiosity. We see in such districts the characteristic white steadings of the douce farming folk, trig fences or hedges about the fields and fat cattle in them, winding roads and not a few agreeable villages and county towns. It is not, however, dramatic country. The hills, the cliffs, the deep and romantic rivers, the evocative moorlands—all the surprises of travel lie elsewhere.

Yet we cannot pass out of these quiet Lowland provinces without paying tribute to the charm and individuality of some of the small towns that are their capitals. To linger in Kirkcudbright, for instance, is to rest a while in the past, when men used whitewash and red tiles in their treatment of quaint closes and local

architects followed the chaste example of the Adam brothers in their design of the larger houses. If one would not linger long, even for the sake of Thomas Carlyle, in the modern Ecclefechan of Old Red Sandstone, there is joy for the seeing eye in the birthplace of his Jane Welsh-Haddington, Lamp of the Lothians, a gracious place with its own space and dignity and flavour of the elegant antique. So it is in greater or lesser degree in other towns of the county sort—Ayr, Lanark, Cupar, Elgin, Grantown-on-Spey, Bridge-of-Allan, Nairn, or Annan—that are so seldom visited for themselves alone.

On the other hand, little needs to be said here of those cities and towns that are acknowledged show-places. What, that is new, is there to declare of Edinburgh with its Castle, its Princes Street, and its crowding associations with the dynastic, military, literary, and social histories of Scotland? Nor does the traveller need guidance to the sister rock of Stirling with the fine castle on its crown and the field of Bannockburn filagreed by the tortuous Forth below. Not many will naturally visit Dumbarton, the westernmost of the three volcanic crags that are strung across Scotland like a necklace and determined so much of its military history, but the barracks and gardens of it have their wistful charm, even if the town below is a sad symbol of the worst man can do in his industrial moods.

We need not pause in Aberdeen, taking its grey granite, its riotous fish-market, and the sweetness of King's College and the Old Town for granted. Glasgow and Dundee have just nothing to show in the way of beauty—though much more than their sister cities in the way of social interest. One might pause a little while in Falkirk and see how a county town, once the

## LOWLAND SCOTLAND

Mecca of almost every cattle-drover and cattle-dealer in Britain, is all-too-willingly losing its aboriginal character. But one is more likely to hurry on to Linlithgow, not far away, where a fine old palace of the Scottish kings and a pre-Reformation church stand in dignity above a lake; or to Falkland in Fife—a Royal Burgh with a population of about 800!—where another royal pleasance of the sixteenth century raises an elegant façade above the village street; or to Culross, a well-preserved gem of red roofs, old buildings in the Flemish manner, and alluring by-ways.

The towns, however, are naturally incidental to exploration of the Lowland Scottish scene. That is a subtler matter altogether, not to be explained or understood in the tangible terms of stone and lime—though Lowland scenery, as distinct from the Highland variety, has a character and an identity, as well as a charm, that could no doubt be quite successfully analysed by a geologist with the assistance of a botanist and a civil engineer. Humbler men can only consider, and like or dislike, what they see; and it is to our present point that, in the natural impulse of travelling humanity towards the melodramatic glories of the Highlands, the unique loveliness of the Lowlands is too easily overlooked.

The three main railway routes into Scotland, as it happens, traverse most, though not all, of the characteristic types of country to be found in the region. There is certainly a mighty difference between the process of getting to Edinburgh by the London and North-Eastern along the cliffy selvedge of the North Sea and that of reaching the capital with the aid of the London, Midland and Scottish, cutting by Beattock and Symington through a tangle of bronze hills which, but for the sea-gulls on an occasional patch of ploughed land, might be a thousand

miles from the coast. Then the western branch of the L.M.S.—the old Glasgow and South Western line—takes you up the valley of the Nith and into Ayrshire through country gentle and wooded for the most part. Or, somewhat eccentrically, you can approach the heart of Scotland by the lines that follow the Firths of Solway and Clyde and see something quite different.

The east coast route has its own nobility. Here are high cliffs and endless vistas of the tumbling sea, and at the foot of every other cleft in these sea-cliffs is a village of fishermen. It may be a place as big as Eyemouth—big enough to lose scores of able-bodied men on one night of storm. It may be small and quaint and a trifle bleak, like St. Abb's, perched on the precipice above a harbour continually assaulted by waves. It may be snug and pretty like Burnmouth or large like Dunbar, and half a seaside resort for the middle-classes of the cities. Yet these fishing-villages of the east coast run to type, and a rather distinguished type. The winds blow about them always. The shore is either of rock or sand, colourful in the sunlight. Invariably the harbour is to some extent artificial, rectangular concrete completing the natural defences against the shallow, treacherous ocean that used to be called German. In the inner harbour of almost every one of them floats ominously at its moorings the lifeboat.

The life is hard thereabouts. The summer visitor may pay the rent, but the upkeep of the family is apt to be paid in lives of men. The fishing is not what it was; a man takes to the sea on Monday morning and is lucky to be home again by the Saturday. And even if the hold of his vessel be full of fish, who knows what the state of the market may mean in hard labour expended, danger flouted, and extreme discomfort endured—so often

uselessly? In such places man is up against it, as the phrase goes. Magnificent degrees of skill and bravery are exerted for rewards quite trivial in the economic sense. There are few things more beautiful—and more pathetic and thought-provoking—than to see a fisher of St. Abb's or Cockburnspath bring his boat into harbour, among fanged reefs and cross-currents, on a stormy day.

But the paradox of eastern Scotland is that these harsh coasts are backed by farming lands of a peculiarly rich quality. The fields run back from the edge of the cliffs to the hills, green and fruitful, the characteristic white walls of the Scots farmsteadings making delicious splashes against the monotone of pasture or ploughed land. There are not many red roofs in Scotland; the common blue slate covers most of even the rural roofs; but the sombre gleaming of it above the washed walls can make lovely effects against the slopes that rise from ploughed red soil to where the sheep crop the hard, thin grass of the uplands.

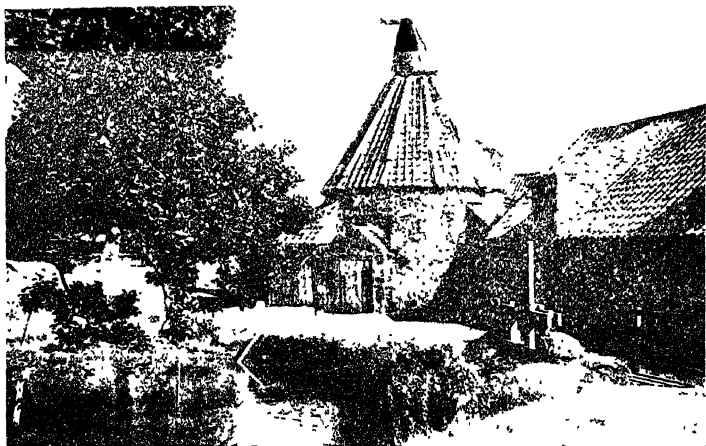
This motif, this element of hearty farmland within an iron binding of cliffy coast, prevails right up the east coast of the country and round the angle of the Moray Firth almost to Inverness. Here and there, as in East Lothian and Fife and Angus, there is a gap in the rocks where dunes of sand prevail and men play golf. Here and there—at Tantallon, Dunnottar, Slains—the magnificent ruins of a castle overhang the sea from a crag. Here and there the hills so press against the shores that the farms behind high-water mark are small and poor. On the whole, however, the attraction of the scenery of these eastern regions is typically coastal. A Barrie or a Violet Jacob may make some small inland town or tributary valley famous, but the country lying inward from the



sea has to be taken as typical in its easy way, rather than striking.

As always in Scotland, the most distinctive characteristics are to be found where there are hills of size; and of the Lowland type we see the most perfect specimens by following the railway or the main road from where they leave the Solway flats and climb northwards over the watershed into Lanarkshire and the valley of the Clyde. They are not fearsome hills of the sort we shall encounter in the Highlands. It is remarkable that so many of them are green to the top, though both Queensberry and Hart Fell rise to well over 2,000 feet. There is not the continual outcrop of rock that gives the mountains of West and North their terrifying character. Even at the 2,000-foot contour are peaty moorlands fit for the black-faced sheep of the country.

These Highlands of the Lowlands are notably given over to sheep farming. It is the country of the gaunt, calm men who live and bring up families in cot-houses that may be six miles away from the nearest habitation. The skyline marks the frontiers of their bailiwicks. Once or twice a week they stride miles over the moors to a farm at the head of the nearest glen, there to pick up provisions delivered by the motor-van of some distant merchant. They know by headmark every sheep of a flock that may be 1,000 strong. Their news and their knowledge of the outer world, if they have any interest in it, they get by favour of the wireless. They are patient, philosophical, observant to a degree. They live nearer to nature than any other sort of inhabitant of these islands. Yet you will find them astonishingly well schooled and well read. A sound basis of education is given them in the tiny schools of the glens. Such a school may have



95 OLD SCOTTISH ARCHITECTURE: THE WATER MILL AT  
EAST LINTON, EAST LoTHIAN



96 SUMMER ON THE TWEED AT ABBOTSFORD, ROXBURGHSHIRE



97 ON THE TWEED NEAR CARDRONA, PEEBLES-SHIRE

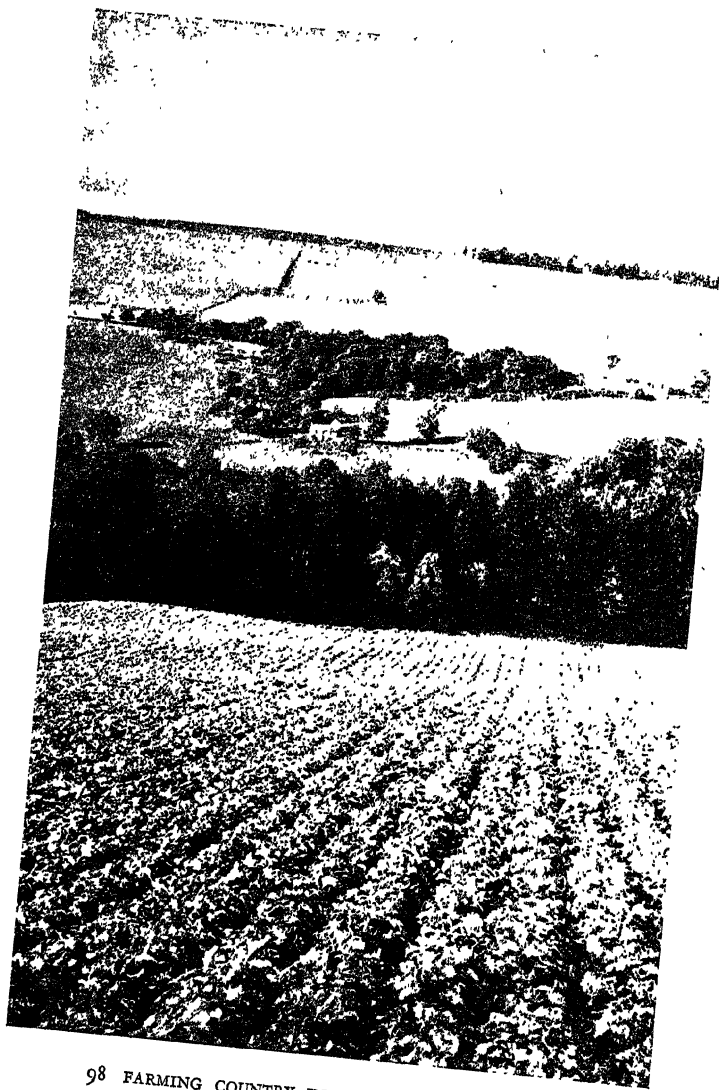
no more than a dozen pupils, all destined to be shepherds or the wives of shepherds. It is a tradition.

One might say that these uplands are completely typical of the Lowland scene. The approach to them alone runs through the whole range of characteristic features. The road rises out of flat, fat farming land, climbing among trees until, imperceptibly, the farms have become smaller, the rivers have dwindled to brown streams, growing crops given place to smooth bronze-green hillsides, marked here and there with a fan of scree thrown out by an occasional winter torrent. Then the deciduous trees disappear and there is only an occasional clump of fir or a plantation of spruce and pine. Then the river is a little burn running in a deep ditch through the soft peat. Then it gets colder, and the gradient eases, and you may see mile upon tumbling mile of moorland, of which the feature is mainly its curious straw-brown colour, with a tarn here and there reflecting whatever colour may be in the sky and the cries of peesweeps and lambs emphasizing the loneliness.

Nature plays on this more or less fixed scale over a very wide area of the Lowlands, for even the busiest and drabest of the industrial districts have some wilderness of the sort overhanging their illusion of sociability. From a busy street of central Glasgow one may raise wondering eyes to the Campsie Fells or the Kilsyth Hills. The charming Ochils brood thus above the busy plain on the northern banks of the Forth. So with the Pentlands, the Moorfoots, and the Lammermuirs, beloved of Scott and Stevenson. So with that remarkable group—which locally they call 'The Back o' the World'—that forms a triangle of isolation with the black spots of Paisley, Greenock, and Dalry marking its apexes. Only

at one point in the Lowlands do the hills riot beyond their type to something approximating to the wildness of the Highlands, and the wonder is that the austere splendour of the region is not better known. From the quiet, fruitful fields of Ayr and Wigtown and Kirkcudbright rise the Carrick and Galloway Hills. Here are fierce outcrops of volcanic rock that sound the notes of danger and desolation. The names of the peaks are evocative—Shalloch on Minnoch, Kirrierock, Black Laggan, and Lamachan. It is very wild up there. Climbers look death in the eyes on the crags and men are lost in the moss-hags. Even between the douce county towns of Newton Stewart and Ayr, connected by an excellent bus service, there is a world of danger and dark beauty.

Two aspects of this sort of country may be specifically recommended. To go by road from Edinburgh to Moffat, for instance, is as illuminating as any Lowland journey may be. A fine Scottish city, its typical suburbs, and the characteristic small towns of the foothills have to be traversed. After that there is only an occasional hamlet set in high farming country—rough pasture for hardy cattle running to cold brown hills. Then (for this great river runs almost due north in the first miles of its course) the highway follows the infant Tweed to where, at its source, there is typical moorland of the sort just described. Culter Fell raises its gaunt 2,400 feet to the westward. Yet still the road climbs until, at 1,334 feet above sea-level, it turns about a windy shoulder to fall by the Devil's Beef Tub into the valley of the Annan and the clean, quiet streets of the little spa of Moffat, where the bronze effigy of a ram connotes the main interest of the district.



98 FARMING COUNTRY IN GLEN SHEE, PERTHSHIRE



99 THE SOUTH SHORE OF THE FIRTH OF TAY, NEAR NEWBURGH, FIFE

This Devil's Beef Tub is a thing worth seeing for itself, and particularly well worth seeing as something completely typical of the region. The hills collapse, as it were, from great heights to form a deep cup of bright green. The depth of it must astound whosoever runs over the pass and sees its profundity under his feet. Some say it is so called because the cattle-reivers of old corralled in the recess what they had taken from the fat farms of the lower ground, but one can see easily enough that the name is just a small fragment of folk-poetry. There is in any glimpse of that pit some suggestion of the daemonic. To come that way in winter, with cold flurries of snow scudding over the summit of the pass, is to be uncomfortably near to the elementals. Posts by the roadside ominously mark its line lest the snow drift deep and wayfaring man lose his way.

And a mile or two below, in the cosiness of Moffat, there are trees again, though mainly of the evergreen sort, all the amenities of a market town, and not a few of those of a popular resort.

But they are wild roads that lead out of Moffat, for the most part, and that which rises steeply out of the town to climb over the shoulder of Hartfell in the north-easterly direction is as typical in its way as that which has brought us down past the edge of the Devil's Beef Tub. For here the ascent is fairly sharp and we quickly leave behind the conifers and the patches of green field in the bottom of the strath, and climb among dark, cold hills, the grey mares' tails of mountain waterfalls sending their drifts of spray almost on to the highway. Here is a fine glimpse of the Highlands of the Lowlands, one that in the right circumstances has the power to send a little thrill of terror down the spine, so that it is a psychological



relief, even in fine weather, to come out on the enclosed plateau where, on the isthmus between St. Mary's Loch and the Loch o' the Lowes, stands Tibbie Shiel's Inn and all its associations with Scott and Hogg and the rest of their group.

Here is the head of Yarrow Water, eternally romanticized by the balladists and the poets, Wordsworth among them, who piously followed in the footsteps of the ancient versifiers. Whether the scenery of the vale, considered objectively as scenery, fully justifies the fame is a matter for the individual taste; that it is at least pleasant beyond the ordinary is unarguable. The glen holds its arms wide, as it were, to catch the play of sunlight on the smooth hills. Anon it narrows a little and the deciduous trees appear again and richness returns to the scene until, where Yarrow and Ettrick meet to join the Tweed in unison, we are in the heart of that Border Country so enriched in associations by the genius of Walter Scott that it is hard for the most coolly detached eye to assess its true scenic values. Perhaps one could fairly say that it is pretty rather than magnificent, this region of broad streams and abbeys and castles in ruins, of green water-meads and fine trees. But that it has its definite character is all that need concern us now.

'Annan, Tweed and Clyde,' runs the rhyme, 'rise out of ae hillside,' that mountainous tangle above Moffat through which we passed not long ago; and the Tweed, running northwards at first and then eastwards, has beauties the others cannot boast. It is a singularly enchanting river in its bright youth, notably from about Broughton down to Peebles; sparkling along through a fairly narrow valley to where it is swollen by the Lyne and Manor Waters to make one last exquisite loop, with

the fine peel of Neidpath above the curved banks of shingle, before running its long course through the tweed-manufacturing towns of the Borders. In all the region we are never far from that broad and brawling river or its innumerable tributaries. All the crowding lore of the district is inseparably associated with it. Scott's Abbotsford looks upon the stream; the bald Eildon hills are ringed by it; and all the storied abbeys save one have their walls almost washed by those waters hurrying towards Berwick and the sea.

The abbeys alone, the charm and the history of them, are jewels no travelling eye can resist, but it is necessary to understand that they confer dignity upon townships not otherwise remarkable. It is doubtful if, lacking the tragic splendour of its ruins, Melrose as an aggregation of stone and lime would give the wayfarer any impulse to linger. Jedburgh has its magnificent fane, but again—for all that the valley in which it stands has its own remote charm and it can boast an ancient house associated with Mary Queen of Scots—there seems thereabouts little other temptation to linger. Kelso, whose local ruin is the most fragmentary of the lot, alone compasses the corresponding dignity: notably in the fine Rennie bridge that leads the main road with a swaggering dignity into the town.

The ruined abbey of the Borders is surely at its best in Dryburgh. It lies remote from the busier settlements of man. The stranger, walking or driving there without a guide, has to explore for it amid a tangle of ambiguous roads. The Tweed and the woods crowding on its banks obscure the landmarks. One comes upon Dryburgh Abbey with a little shiver of surprise and delight. The reward, however, is rich. The ruins amid the great

trees have a sweetness far beyond those of piles that may want more architectural interest. The place has the air of a shrine in idyllic country—an air enriched by the fact that the bones of Walter Scott and Douglas Haig lie near together in the ruined choir. A sure instinct has made of this island of peace by the murmuring Tweed something of a national shrine. Nowhere else, in one view, are the scenic character and atmosphere of the Border Country more perfectly symbolized.

And now that we have fairly traversed those areas of the Lowlands of Scotland that are most typical of the whole in their picturesque qualities we turn at the last to one exquisite corner of the country that is strangely neglected by the generality of travellers and that depends for its attractiveness much less on association and convenience than other regions. It is true that an important connection with Ireland runs by rail from Carlisle to Stranraer, that Scott suffered his Dirk Hatterick to endow the northern shores of the Solway with a certain romantic allure, and that S. R. Crockett used the background of the Galloway moorlands for many of the products of his gentle pen. Even so, the country that lies roughly in the triangle pointed by Dumfries, Ayr, and Stranraer is left largely unvisited, though it is in its variety and its charm of a quite singular attractiveness.

Three distinct elements go to the creation of this quality. Over-weening the whole region are those rough hills and haggard moors we have already glanced at. Below them lies farming country of a richness so unusual that the pastures of Wigtownshire support herds of cows, each more than a hundred strong, and provide Britain with a goodly proportion of its milk and cream and cheese. Then comes the coastline: here an estuary

of mud with an old white town, faintly Dutch in atmosphere, at the head of it; here cliffs that tumble to the sea and remote beaches of white sand; there a fine old village with woods about it, on the edge of those flat, golden, treacherous sands for which the Solway is famous; and again, on a windswept point, a fishing-hamlet that might have been lifted direct from remote East Anglia or the coasts of Friesland.

All the towns of the region, with the possible exception of Stranraer, have their quiet distinction—Kirkcudbright, Newton Stewart, Castle Douglas, Gathouse of Fleet, Wigtown, and Whithorn, where St. Ninian of old built *Candida Casa*, the first stone church in Scotland and long an object of pilgrimage.

This is the real Scotland, the true Lowland Scotland. Hereabouts the folks are grave and kindly and respectful of the Presbyterian faith, working hard in the communal atmosphere of the big farms and relaxing naturally when night comes into the ritual of family prayer, led by the patriarch of the house, and the simple music and song of byre and bothy. It enjoys in many ways the ideal constitution in both the economic and social senses—everything based ultimately and directly on the land and its products, with little industrialism to set up drab and confusing problems and every town existing mainly in its right as a market.

As for its picturesque qualities, they can be seen in all their sweet variety in the course of a run from Dumfries to Stranraer by the roads nearest the coast. They drive westwards through green and not unhistorical country—for a ruin so splendid as Sweetheart Abbey is on the way; they soar over rocky headlands and down steep slopes to such alluring resorts above the Solway sands.

as Colvend and Auchencairn. There are fragmentary abbeys again to halt the curious at Dundrennan and Glenculce; it is worth while to leave the main road and slip down to where Kippford and Rockcliffe smile with a half-Dutch, half-Mediterranean sweetness on the swift estuary of the Urr. Over the Solway there always hangs a queer, pearly light. The roads are strangely empty of traffic even in the height of summer. The region has a remoteness altogether fascinating.

And it is as good a way as any to the Highlands, for the road that runs on up the eastern shores of the Firth of Clyde from Stranraer to Ayr and even, with an occasional gap of drabness, so far as Greenock, is in a defensible view the finest in Scotland. It is certainly the Scottish Corniche—charming up the shores of Loch Ryan (where they breed excellent oysters), romantic where it turns inland up Glenapp to by-pass Carlock Hill and reach the coast again at Ballantrae (where Stevenson was stoned for the eccentricity of his walking costume), and sheerly noble as it climbs over Bennane Head to fall once more to the bends and rocky passes that lead it at sea-level into Girvan.

It is a road splendid for its own variety, more splendid for the views that are to be had from it. Ailsa Craig is out there in the sea, seeming miraculously to move with the movements of the observer. The peaks of Arran stand up grandly against the western horizon; and to see them from Bennane Head, gilt by the sunset, is to be exquisitely tortured by wonder and surmise; behind Arran, blue in the distance, the little hills of Knapdale; and then tier upon tier of hill, stretching far into the Highlands we now approach.

George Blake

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HIGHLAND SCOTLAND:  
*THE MOUNTAINS, LOCHS AND  
ISLANDS*

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THE Highlands of Scotland proclaim themselves from afar off. On the road from Edinburgh to Stirling you will see the frieze of the Grampians rise above the northern horizon, blue and dramatic and unmistakable. You may sail from grey Glasgow down the canalized Clyde and be astonished at one sudden turn of the channel by the peaks of Cowal ahead. There are few Scotsmen who, emigrating to flatter lands, are not for ever lifting their eyes unconsciously for the expected sight of those Highland hills.

The Lowlands have their mountains, as we have seen, but there could be no confusion of the types by anybody with even average powers of observation. All sorts of subtleties of contour, mass, and coloration distinguish the kinds. In general, the Highland hill is more rugged and theatrical than even the wildest height of Galloway,

and it is specially distinguished—perhaps an effect of “atmospherics”—by its capacity to take on at a distance a wistful, cerulean blue. Then the masses of them are tremendous. You might say that the whole of Scotland lying west of the Dumbarton-Inverness line, and not a few hundred square miles to the east of it, are continually mountainous, with farming land (and that rough enough) to be found only in the glens and along the coasts.

It is country only sparsely inhabited, for where there is not hill fit only for grouse and deer and sheep, there is a wealth of water. Fresh-water lochs endlessly stud the map of the region, and a glance at it shows how the whole western coast is fantastically indented by arms of the sea. An American writer once declared that the map of Scotland reminded him of nothing so much as a terrier jumping for a ball, and the figure is just in its suggestion of the tousled character of both the outline and the surface of the country north of Clyde and Tay.

Even so, this general type of scenery has in the Highlands its subtle and charming variants. For instance, the aspect of the country lying along and to the west of the Great North Road between Dunkeld and Blair Atholl is immensely individualistic. It might be said to represent perfectly the conventional notion of what the Highlands are like and to have inspired every backcloth ever designed for a Gathering of the Clans on the British stage. And it is in itself naturally theatrical. Such a lake as Loch Katrine, approached through that delightful little wooded pass known as the Trossachs, almost seems to parody the prettiness of the myriad grocers' calendars it has inspired, and though they are washed by waters destined eventually to flow through the domestic pipes of Glasgow, Ellen's Isle and the Silver Strand



100 STORM OVER BEN STACK, SUTHERLAND





101 WINTER ON THE LOCHAY RIVER, PERTHSHIRE

## HIGHLAND SCOTLAND

are as charmingly romantic to the eye as Chillon or Ehrenbreitstein.

Once more the power of literary association endows the region with a vast popularity, and once more Sir Walter Scott is the villain of the piece, but that romantic eye did not err when it chose such a setting for 'The Lady of the Lake'. All the scenic desiderata of glamour are hereabouts—placid waters reflecting the sky's blue, frowning crags, darkly shadowed passes, and wooded hills. Divorced of every literary and historical association, the Lake District of Perthshire is still incredibly lovely in its own right.

So it is farther to the northward. Loch Tay may seem a thought bleak with its vast expanse of water and the cold peak of Ben Lawers rising above, but even Loch Lomond, at the very gates of Glasgow, sounds a note of charm that persists throughout the region. One may revolt against the sentimentality of a 'Queen's View' at the eastward end of Loch Tummel, but standing on that out-jutting rock, with river and lake and the moor stretching beyond Loch Rannoch and the great hill called Schiehallion all in the eye at once, the sternest republican could hardly deny that Victoria knew loveliness when she saw it. On a fine day the peaks about Glencoe stand up beyond the brown expanse of moorland, and one almost thinks to see the glow above the western seas. It is an amazing eyeful (deliberately to use a convenient Americanism) of a singularly beautiful part of Scotland.

There are those who will argue that Perthshire is not truly of the Highlands since its people have nowadays lost, notably in the matters of language and social habit, almost everything of the original Gaelic quality; but that is to quibble. The characteristic mountains and lochs are there for all to admire, and it is not without

significance that the popular mind does particularly admire the Perthshire sort of scenery, and it could fairly be held that to have passed a day in Pitlochry is to know one outstanding aspect of the Highlands tolerably well. The place is surrounded by hills adorned with conifers that might have been planted by the Harker family to serve as models for their scenic designs. That remarkable gorge they call the Pass of Killiecrankie, with the Garry rushing through deep clefts in the rock, is not a thing to be dismissed because large and noisy parties in charabancs come to gape at it. And beyond the Pass are always the mountains and moorlands and that brown desolation so characteristic of endless tracts of those uplands.

This note of prettiness, rather than of sombre beauty, recurs in many parts of the Highlands. You will meet it again about Grantown-on-Spey, at Strathpeffer, and far to the south at Crinan in Mid-Argyll. It is what might be called the scenery of the Highland glens as distinct from the scenery of high, cold land and from the scenery of the western coast. Individual taste may prefer one of the other varieties, but this is certainly a sort that, however obvious and reminiscent of beauties seen abroad, is one of the main elements in the triumphant chord of Highland beauty.

Perhaps its excessive popularity is a lingering remnant of Victorian feeling. It was certainly endeared to the British public by the dear Queen's affection for similar scenes on Deeside and by the general acceptance of that romantic spirit so well nicknamed 'Balmorality' by Mr. George Scott-Moncrieff. And to take that pretty combination of conifers, rivers, and lakes as completely representative of the Highlands is to miss beauty infinitely more austere and profound and elusive. It is all



102 LOCH ALSH, LOOKING TO THE HILLS OF SKYE, INVERNESS-SHIRE



103 LOCH LEVEN AND THE GLENCOE HILLS, ARGYLLSHIRE

## HIGHLAND SCOTLAND

very much a matter of taste, indeed, but it is at the least tenable that Scotland has its very finest glories to show along the western seaboard, where the sea contributes its unique quota to the scene and the obviousness of stretches of fresh water is replaced by the immensities of ocean, beyond which lie the islands that are on the chart and some that are not. . . .

It does not, indeed, take any Scottish road much time to rise out of the pretty glens to the high, hard country, of which there is so much more in Scotland than there is of any other sort. From charming Pitlochry and sweet Blair Atholl the Great North Road climbs steeply by the youthful Garry, through woods that degenerate into clumps of hazel and birch growing on land that hardens with every hundred feet of altitude, until there is only gaunt, brown hill about and the pass takes the wayfarer to a height of some 1,200 feet above sea-level near Dalwhinnie. It is not a comfortable scene that meets his eye then. The hills are large and gaunt and threatening, for the most part, the habitations few and small and white. It seems cold and lonely—and it is very much so in the dead of winter; and one realizes that even sheep can get only a meagre living out of those uplands that are more brown than green. 'Sporting rights' may represent a social anomaly and keep the foot-traveller off a whole world of magnificent country, but they are still the direct economic consequence of the physical conditions prevailing in this unfriendly land—peat, outcrops of hard stone, and spasmodic torrents fashioned fantastically by the volcanic and glacial crises of the distant past.

Unfriendly. . . . The word has to be used. But there are those who love this sort of scenery, and do so with reason. Britain has no wilder stuff to show; the urban

dweller is at once affrighted, fascinated and delighted by these brown wildernesses, where there may be the risk of death in any casually planned walk across the moors, and the sweeping lines of mountain-sides suggest the work of a noble and grandiose Architect. These are the true Highlands—the high lands. Their splendid desolation is the motif of the whole region. From the enormous massif of the Cairngorms, north and west and sou'-west to Cape Wrath and Wester Ross and Lorn, there is little else, though our human habit makes us more familiar with the occasional glens and passes and lakes that allow us to drive our trains and cars and boats through the wilderness.

It is all desolate now, given over to the grouse and the deer and the mountaineer, or, at the best, the sheep farmer; but yet it is well to remember that such country was natural to the aboriginal Highlander, and that in such bleak surroundings he contrived to be happy according to his lights. He could defend these grim passes to the point of death. About Dalwhinnie, where the Great North Road reaches its highest point before falling into the valley of the swift Spey, the clans of old would gather in warlike array. There they repulsed Cromwell in his day, and, more than a hundred years later, the Hanoverian General Cope. Farther down the glen, near Kingussie, Ruthven Barracks were built in 1718 to keep the Highlanders in check, but Bonnie Prince Charlie's Highlanders destroyed them in 1746. The present desolation of these uplands is largely the result of a series of 'clearances', now so economic and political in their interest that there is no space here to describe them; but the clearances had their root in the failure of the Jacobite Cause, and a strict reading of history



104 WINTER IN GLEN GARRY, INVERNESS-SHIRE





105 GLEN AFFRIC WITH ITS LONELY LOCH, INVERNESS-SHIRE

## HIGHLAND SCOTLAND

would indicate that the depopulation of the Highlands began when General Wade, carrying out his commission against the King's enemies, inaugurated his series of military roads that had these same Ruthven Barracks as their focal point and that can be traced still on their tortuous course through the moors by any sufficiently observant and nostalgic eye.

It is all an old story now. Every corner of the Highlands has its old story. But the region is not fully appreciated unless there be some understanding of the historical factors behind the Highlanders' story and of the exotic nature of Gaeldom. It is a country haunted by ghosts, and it is the lamentable fact that more and more ghosts are left, even in our modern days, to haunt it. The number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland declined from 158,779 in 1921 to 136,135 in 1931—a fall of nearly 15 per cent in ten short years. The Lowland towns and the Dominions have got them, and the place thereof shall know them no more. That is at least worth remembering when we are at once charmed and irritated by the suave indolence and deferential evasiveness of the Highlander; just as we accept the glamour of Prince Charles and Flora Macdonald as being as much a part of the allure of Skye as the jagged peaks of the Coolins. It is also worth remembering, if only as a cold fact, that the Highlanders are a race defeated by foreign invasion—a defeat acceptable enough at the hands of Cumberland's redcoats, but not so agreeable when the foe is represented by shooting-tenants with an interest only in the grouse they pay through the nose to kill and a firm determination to deny the most blameless traveller access to such mountains as it occurs to him to climb.

But the loveliness and the crowding associations

remain. There is always the King's Highway to follow as it drives up the bleak hillsides and down the green occasional glens that are practicable. We may as well confess to ourselves that the prevailing desolation, however regrettable in the social sense, contributes to the Highlands a powerful part of their allure. One would not perhaps choose to linger long, except for the specific purposes of fishing or shooting or mountaineering, in any place high among the hills and far from the sea. A Dalwhinnie or an Altnaharra is something well worth the seeing, but the frail soul of humanity cannot long withstand the oppression of the mountains and longs for sights less forbidding than the play of cloud-shadow on bare, bronze slopes or the long scarves of white moisture that so often hang low on the hills and are composed of the legendary 'Scotch mist'.

That is why it is legitimate to hold that the very best of the Highlands is to be seen along the western seaboard. Again, the maps show us how fantastically it is indented by the sea, and the imagination should be able to conceive how those long and tortuous fjords add magnificently to the scenic effects, and how the very mystery of the sea, its long fingers groping amid the mountains to fumble among the tangles of golden weed that line the shores, more exquisitely intensifies the apprehension of Highland beauty than all the stories of Prince Charlie put together. Blue water, golden weed, green bracken on the lower slopes, and the brown of moorland or the purple of heather above—with an occasional white cottage set against a monstrous hillside: these elements can make compounds of the most ravishing sort. Here and there in the bays is sand, the white sand of the west. The glens running down to the sea

## HIGHLAND SCOTLAND

are green, and even the theatrical effects of central Perthshire frequently recur—for instance, at the head of Loch Shiel, precisely where Charles Edward unfurled the flag that was to lead the clansmen as far as Derby—and ultimately to destruction on Culloden Moor by Inverness.

It is a country of small fishermen and crofters, for the most part, and the population is scattered. Oban and Fort William—rather mean little towns on glorious sites—flourish on the strength of the railways of which they are the focal points, and the bigger of them has just a little more than 6,000 permanent inhabitants. So with Mallaig, so with Portree in Skye, so with Stornoway in Lewis. Isolation complete can be discovered in the West Highlands by all who seek it. Where communal life exists there is yet little background save the harsh and strictly preserved hills. There may be a sheep farm at the head of a glen. There will be a few crofts scattered along the flat ground by the sea. A local popularity with holiday-makers may have set up a somewhat ill-advised villa here and there. But the modern life is based largely on the sea and its harvest, and all over the country behind these riparian settlements are scattered the ruins of the croft-houses of the aboriginal clansmen or those of the summer shielings, to which the younger of them temporarily repaired when their bestial were out at grass; the kindly nettle now covering the hearths voluntarily or perforce deserted.

But even if such a rough analysis of the western scene has a general application, there are infinite varieties of beauty up and down that gnarled seaboard. In Sutherland, in lovely Wester Ross, the hills are for the most part high and jagged, freakish background for charming white villages, like Ullapool and Plockton. The sea

runs in narrow lochs and kyles among a constellation of islands. The roads are rough and steep and cramped, so that wayfaring by car in these districts is an adventure in itself. But at every turn there is a new and astonishing vista or a sandy bay that shouts to be bathed in. On the raw rock of mountain and shore-line the light over the sea plays the most fantastic tricks of colour. Filling the eye always, the background of all existence in that region, are the sea and the islands and the mountains of the islands.

From this splendid melodrama, moving southward, the aspect of the country softens to the charm of the district of Morar; and it is a curiously symbolic fact that we move thus from an area where the most rigid Presbyterianism prevails into one of which the natural Catholicism dates from before the Reformation. In Ross they will (quite naturally and sincerely) frown on Sunday play of any sort. In the year of grace 1934 they held a solemn day of fasting and prayer because the appropriate authority sanctioned the running of excursions by motor-bus into the territory. Whereas in Morar the people, most of them Macdonalds of an ancient strain, take life with a charming and ever-so-slightly evasive ease, take in summer visitors with alacrity, and, for the rest, live comfortably enough on their crofts with the anxious aid of the Board of Agriculture.

There is much in the air of the district of Morar to encourage the *dolce far niente* attitude to life. Hereabouts prettiness breaks out again. The hills near the sea are small and tangled and charming. Along the coast lie vast stretches of very white sand, broken up in the most ravishing way by colourful reefs of rock. Trees are quite plentiful in these parts. Islands of a fantastically romantic character are scattered everywhere on the outlying sea.



106 LOCH EISHORT AND THE RED HILLS, ISLE OF SKYE



107 THE BARRA ISLES, OUTER HEBRIDES: CASTLEBAY IN THE FOREGROUND

And the shade of Charles Edward Stuart stalks the land. He landed in Scotland for his great adventure at the head of Loch-nan-Uamh, near the lovely hamlet of Arisaig. They will show you caves and meeting-places associated with his name. You will agree that the Stuarts had a singularly sensitive eye for the appropriate background. No more magnificent site for the launching of a Cause could be imagined than the field at the head of Loch Shiel, where, under rocky hills and amid the firs and by the lapping of small waves on a stony shore, a rather ugly monument marks where the Jacobite standard of the Forty-five was raised.

For a long way southward the coastal scenery represents variants of the rugged stuff of Wester Ross and the prettier abandon of Morar. The peninsula of Ardnamurchan is remote and rough and desolate, culminating in a bleak and dangerous point, feared by seamen. Lochaber is wild in the upland way with Britain's highest peak, Ben Nevis, so grouped among its peers that only at a rare point is any useful impression of its height and mass to be got. Appin and Benderloch are soft in comparison, the typical charm of Morar recurring hereabouts—with the subtle difference that there is little sand on the shores and the charm of the seaward aspect is largely made up by innumerable small islands and the ramifications of the sea-lochs. Oban marks the gateway to the lands of Lorn, strangely and unreasonably neglected by the generality of travellers.

Perhaps the dominance of Glasgow over this region accounts for the neglect. After all, Oban is only a three-hours' run by car from that overwhelming city; and the accident of history—the Marquises and Dukes of Argyll were always powerfully and safely on the side of



*the status quo*—has denied it a sufficiency of associations to compete with fabled Morar. Yet it is lovely country of the alluring sort, a thought more settled and prosperous than the regions to the north of it. Its salt-water lochs are magnificent, and there are few things of the kind more delightful than Loch Sween, which runs from the sea into the land in a fascinating series of pools, as it were, and has an air strangely remote and *mignon*. Loch Awe is a magnificent stretch of fresh water; and it may be doubted if there is any view in Scotland finer than the one you get as, coming out of Dalmally over the hill, you see its islands (one of them an ancient burial-ground of the Campbells of Argyll), all pretty and seeming to float on an ocean of fairyland under the magnificent mass of Ben Cruachan.

And if historical association be valuable at all one can surely find it, superimposed on vast natural beauty, at Crinan, where a canal cuts through the narrowest neck of the long peninsula of Kintyre. The little loch of Crinan has a quite singular charm, and so have the little hills that surround it. The River Add flows lazily—as if in a water-colour by Russell Flint—through a mile or two of sodden sand. As often as not in hot weather you will see shaggy cattle resting on these sands by the sea, while the old, small castle of Duntroon, at the narrow mouth of the loch, adds the last perfect touch to a picture that might have been planned to exhibit a dominant type of Highland scene to perfection. And here it was that the invading Celts from Ireland, who gave the Highlands their dominant blood and culture, set up their first capital, Dunadd.

The Highlands end gloriously enough at the Mull of Kintyre, but there remain the Islands. . . . It would be



108 THE RIFT IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS: LOOKING ALONG THE GREAT GLEN FROM  
LOCH OICH TO LOCH NESS, INVERNESS-SHIRE



109 WINTER IN ROTHIEMURCHUS FOREST, STRATHSPEY, INVERNESS-SHIRE

wrong, however, to leave this western region of Scotland without even the briefest glance into the characteristic glens that lead back from the coast to the uplands and the moors. No serious traveller can avoid encountering at one end or the other the Great Glen, that remarkable geological 'fault' which splits the country diagonally from Inverness to Fort William, which is filled by a chain of lochs now linked to make a canal, and which has great interest and beauty all along its length—even, in this fourth decade of the twentieth century, a Monster in Loch Ness. The scenery of the Great Glen, however, does not differ so very notably from that of other parts that it demands inspection for itself alone; whereas one can say almost defiantly that no visit to Scotland is adequate that does not include a peep into the fantastic inferno of Glencoe.

This pass is curiously significant in more than one respect. From the Moor of Rannoch, so thoroughly typical of upland country and still covered with the stumps of the trees that composed the original Caledonian Forest, it carries one of the main roads from the Lowlands down to the western seaboard. It was the scene, at the seaward end, of one of the most dreadful and typical episodes in the history of the Highlanders and their deliberate degradation—the Massacre of Glencoe. It is in itself, as observers so different as Dorothy Wordsworth, Charles Dickens, and Queen Victoria have testified, as strange an aggregation of daemonic peaks as is to be seen in Britain. At the Rannoch end it is formidably guarded by forbidding mountains, two of them bearing the absurdly gentle name of the Shepherds of Etive. The road runs into the glen under the threat of precipitous and stern faces of

rock. It seems very dark and eerie in the gutter of the cleft. All sorts of preposterous stories leap to the mind at those sinister suggestions. You are told of the Jacobite army that, sleeping still, awaits the Day in a cave of which the opening is a black dot 1,000 feet up on a sheer face of rock. You know that mountaineers by the score have lost their lives in the assault of these challenging precipices. You are prepared to believe anything of Glencoe. . . . It is a short glen, but there is drama in every foot of it.

Of the islands there is more to say than can be said now. They make a little world apart. To begin with, there are so many of them. To fly over the western seas is to fancy that some eccentric deity had once upon a time been busy with a pepper-pot, so numerous and so casually scattered in the sea are those scores of isles we call the Hebrides. And there is no pretty generalization that can cover them all, so frequently and enormously do they vary in the characters of both the people and the scene. Curiously shaped Islay, for instance, has an air rather suggestive of the Lowlands—big farms, green fields, and husbandmen of the thorough, cautious type; whereas its neighbour Mull is mountainous and brown and socially primitive. The sweet, dry flatness of Tiree and Coll (not to mention Colonsay) is surprising always, as is the fertility of those outlying chunks of land. So it is with Canna and, to a lesser degree, with Eigg in that strange little group which lies off the coast of Morar in contrast to the noble (and ever so strictly preserved) peaks of Rum.

Of the glories of Skye need anything be said at all? That rugged isle has inspired a thousand pens and has latterly achieved enormous popularity among travellers. For the best of reasons, to be sure. Its beauties are of

the spectacular order—the crazy architecture of that tangle of rock called the Quiraing, the splendid security of Portree Harbour, the magnificence of Dunvegan Castle, its relics and legends, the dark terror of Loch Coruisk in its gully, and, over all, the jagged frieze of those pink and terrific mountains, the Coolins, and the enormous legend of Prince Charles and Flora Macdonald.

One sometimes wonders if Skye, like many another island of the Hebrides, is not finer to look at from the mainland than to set foot on; and it may be fancied that more have looked on the Outer Isles from the graveyard where the bones of Flora Macdonald lie than have tempted the rocky and stormy waters of the Minch. That long chain of islands, stretching from the Butt of Lewis to Barra Head is indeed perhaps more alluring for its social interest than for its scenic glories. These it has, to be sure. Barra and Harris have splendid peaks, and the little islands at the southern end, such as Mingulay and Vatersay, cliff scenery of the most magnificent order. The flat islands of North Uist, Benbecula, and South Uist have their charm, lying low in the sea, endlessly studded with water, fringed on the western side with silver sand, and linked by fords that are feasible only at certain states of the tide. Water lies in innumerable hollows all over the chain. To see it from the air is to believe that there is much more water than dry land in the Long Isle, as they call it; and one has known small places near the fords where the inhabitants seem to go through life either in gum boots or with bare legs, amphibians perforce.

But it is the social structure of the Outer Isles that most surely fascinates the visitor, for here are all the extremes to be encountered. Stornoway in Lewis is a

## THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN

bright, brisk little town that has electric light, all the comforts of the Saltmarket, and just escaped being thoroughly industrialized under the aegis of the first Lord Leverhulme. Yet not far away you will find people, with hardly a word of English at their command, living still in 'black houses', those primitive dwellings of unhewn stone, with the smoke of the peat fire finding escape as it can through a hole in the roof. There are parts where they still use the *cas crom*—the hand plough—on their stubborn crofts, and the women labour hard to carry seaweed in great baskets on their backs for the manuring of the grudging fields. They live meagrely by both land and sea, those people of the Outer Isles, and nowhere else in Britain is life more a matter of elementals. And that perhaps is why the social interest culminates in the curious distribution of religious belief up and down the chain, it being almost a perfect case of the most rigid Presbyterianism alternating with ancient and pious Romanism from isle to isle.

And that thought takes us to one last glimpse of both the Islands and the Highlands. There is many an island on which one would fain linger—on Staffa, for instance, with its astonishing pillared caves and its columnar bastions of rock. But both piety and the sense of beauty, as even Dr. Johnson handsomely recognized, may find a last, pleasing satisfaction in Iona, whence Columba started his missionary adventure, where his cathedral stands finely by the western seas, and where sea water and white sand, mountain and pasture, storm and calm combine in a thousand different ways to present to the seeing eye all the essences of Highland scenery and make of that islet off the coast of Mull, perhaps, the ultimate shrine of a fabulous region.

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